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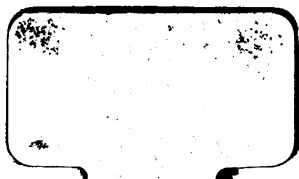
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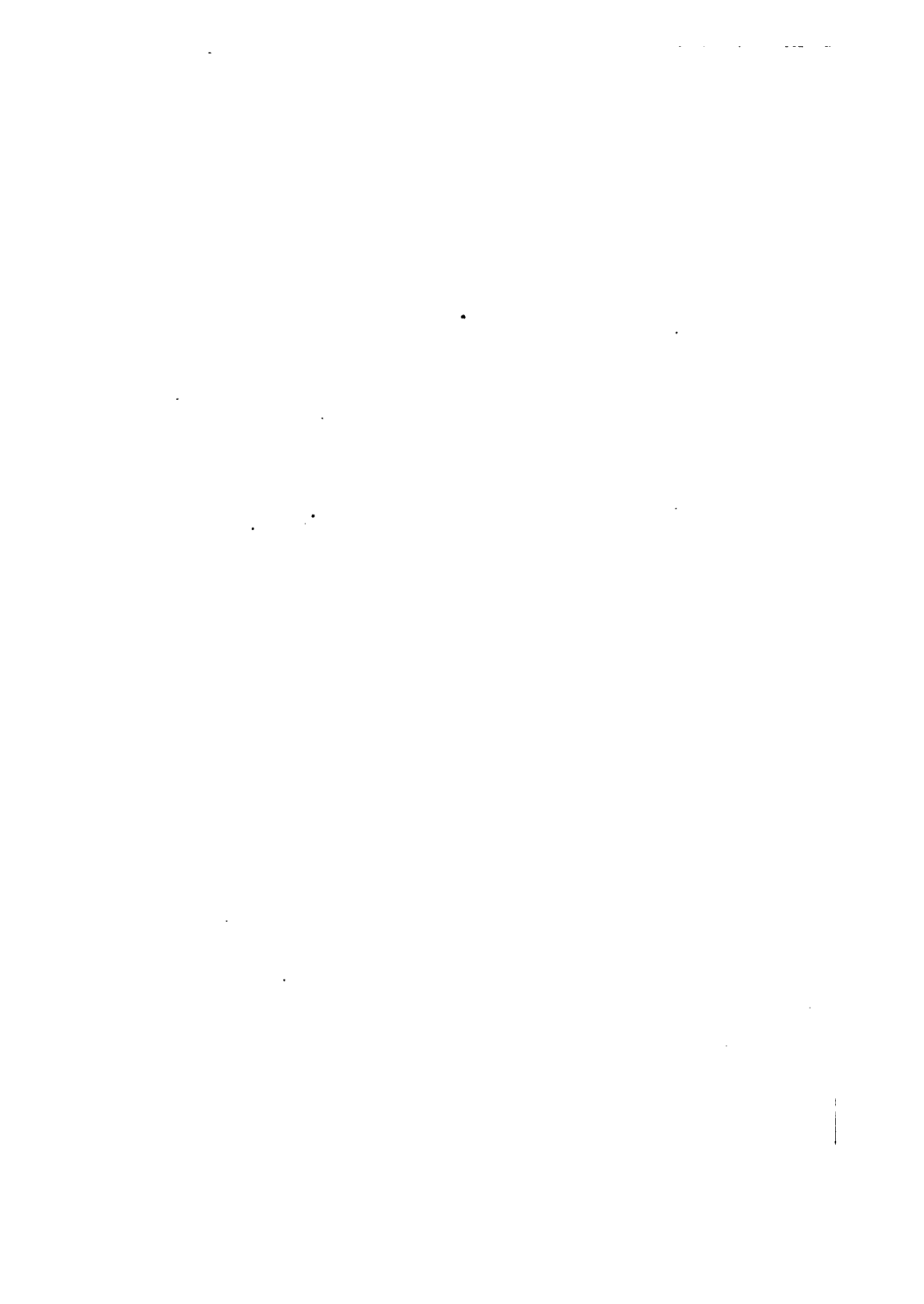
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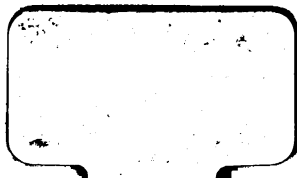
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LOVE OR HATRED.

CHAPTER I.

A BRIDAL AND A BURIAL.

“What! changed so soon?
— Does the fit come on you to prove treacherous
To your past vows and oaths?”

FORD.

IF Florence Werter had entertained any misgivings of Louisa's happiness, her present conduct, and a close observance of Sir Winfred Winlow, lulled them so completely, that she was astonished how a suspicion of her step-daughter's attachment to Major Somers had ever entered into her mind, for, dazzled by her brilliant future, Louisa appeared entirely different from the discontented being who had cast a deeper gloom over that humble dwelling, of which the

great man had never heard; for, meeting Miss Werter first in the family of Dean Netherwell, then at Lady Alcott's, and lastly as the guest of Mrs. Armsby, he had not thought it necessary either to enquire into her circumstances, or to know more about her than that she was the daughter of a gentleman, whose standing in society he knew by repute, and that he loved her.

Miss Armsby proposed that the ceremony should take place at Beechgrove, to which Louisa had returned on the following morning. This proposition was warmly acquiesced in by the family, particularly Rosebud, who, relieved of her jealousy, bestowed much attention on the bride elect, while Louisa, gratified that the Baronet should not be made acquainted with her real position, was profuse in her thanks for the kindness of her friends. This attention was extended to Florence, who, with Lily, came to reside at Beechgrove until the nuptial knot should be tied; and, as ample opportunity was afforded for resuming old friendships, the little girl profited accordingly by becoming reconciled to the erratic Julia.

Sir Winfred Winlow was a somewhat *blazé* votary of fashion. He was rich, and had no tie or kindred to claim a right to property at his demise, which enhanced his value in the matrimonial market considerably. Generous and unspoiled by the world or the adulation that ever hovers about the wealthy, he was proud of his imagined conquest over the heart of a proud beauty, on whom he lavished the most costly presents; and Louisa bade fair to become what many wives of young husbands would exchange their lot for—"an old man's darling."

But smarting under the shock of Audley's indifference, and wounded by the disappointment of a slighted passion, she accepted Winlow's homage with a passive indifference that grieved Florence to witness. Still Miss Werter was apparently happy, and never wavered for a second in her purpose of making the best of Sir Winfred's fortune.

Mrs. Werter received as much attention from the host and hostess as she would have done were she still the independent possessor of Lilymount, and there were few arrangements made

in which she was not the first to be consulted. Perhaps Mrs. Armsby took this means of showing her sister the scorn she felt for the calumny that had assailed Florence through the amorous little Rosebud, who spoke so freely of it at Lady Alcott's, and the letters which had roused all the ire of the Granny's nature against the unknown assailant. Reassured by such kindness, although knowing nothing of its real motive, Florence took an early opportunity of learning that Mr. Fitzroy, or any one likely to be his acquaintance, was not mentioned on the list of wedding guests, and gave herself up to the enjoyment of the hour, secure from her one most dreaded foe, and happy in Louisa's evident satisfaction.

Louisa experienced one disappointment on her bridal morning, which was the non-appearance of Miss Somers, who was confined to her room by a severe cold.

Why such a trifling incident should ruffle the temper of the bride was a mystery to Florence, who never suspected that the proud girl had set her heart on displaying her brilliant fortune not only to Audley but to his sister.

The remainder of the guests were assembled, and an avenue of expectant faces was opened to receive the bride amongst them. She tarried in her chamber, despite the ill-concealed impatience of the Baronet. At last a footstep descended the stairs, and many eyes turned eagerly towards the door, while a lady in a light mauve silk, holding a fair child's hand, entered and smilingly greeted the assembly. Very beautiful, very fascinating, stood this young widow by the side of her fatherless girl. Even the bride was forgotten in the admiration she excited. But a crowd of gentlemen took their places by the door, and Florence was pressed back until she stood beside a tall figure near the mantel piece: it was Major Somers. She perceived the sudden pallor of his face after meeting her, and felt a deeper interest than she had done before in wondering to herself if this could be a fatal mistake after all. What if Louisa had acted too hastily in accepting her present position, by which she might have thrown aside a love once coveted. Yes, it must be so; see how his lip

trembles as he returns a bow of recognition from her who is so near a relative of Miss Werter's; how his voice falters when he addresses her.

What shall she do? How act? Should she fly to the bride and forbid those unnatural nuptials? No, it is too late, for Louisa enters leaning on Mr. Armsby, as calm and self-possessed as ever, while Mrs. Werter turns from her with a shudder, at what she fears to be her loveless condition; then looks again upon the young soldier; their eyes meet, tremblingly, eagerly, wistfully, while the blood mounts to the brow of Florence and Audley turns paler than before.

Murmurs of admiration follow Louisa, but the Baronet will not give her time to listen, for he is impatient to call the splendid creature all his own; they kneel, and the fatal ceremony begins, while, distinct and slowly, the minister pronounces those solemn words which fall, alas! too frequently upon unheeding ears, and are often as meaningless as they are now to her who kneels so proudly, with a falsehood on her lip, repeating

the sacred vow, which, once over, is forgotten in the congratulations which gather thick and fast about her.

Florence turns to mark if Major Somers will offer his, and finds that he is one of the first to do so. He advanced to the veiled figure with a calm but kindly look, and she heard his voice speak the ceremonious words as steadily as if they were spoken to a stranger. But Louisa passes abruptly from him, and he did not see the expression on her white face, which the veil concealed, or he would not be so light of heart as he made his way to the side of Florence.

It was not a very joyous wedding after all, for an uncomfortable restraint had taken possession of the guests, which lasted until the Baronet and Lady Winlow drove off in their splendid vehicle, as the first move on their wedding tour. Then a cloud seemed to have been removed from the fashionable atmosphere, and the gentlemen grew merry after the *dejeuner*, and the ladies coquetted prettily with those whom they thought worthy of the honour.

Florence and Audley had often met before,

but never at a social meeting like the present, where she saw him in a new light. Although esteeming him always, he never appeared to such advantage as on the day of Louisa's nuptials, where he seemed to be beloved and respected by all who knew him. If a thought of the young soldier had ever before entered a heart endeavouring to be faithful to a buried love, it was dismissed as a sacrilege; but that night, when the head of Florence pressed a sleepless pillow, it was with the terrible conviction of a long dreaded truth, as she asked herself the reason of her joy at Miss Werter's marriage, or what was the cause of the rapturous delight that shot like a ray from heaven into her soul when she remarked Audley's calm indifference as to her choice. "Did she love him herself?" At the last question she laid her brow closer to the sunny locks of Lily, and nestling beside the little slumberer, blushed at the answer.

Julia Armsby, who was always of a weak and sickly constitution, had been pining gradually for the last twelve months, despite the anxious care that surrounded her. However, she ap-

peared to rally in the companionship of Lily Werter, who, to please the invalid, was left at Beechgrove, after Florence had returned to her cottage home.

But once the novelty of her presence had worn off, the weakling faded faster than before, and Mrs. Armsby, watching with the untiring zeal of a mother's heart, knew that her child was sinking gently into an untimely grave.

A week had scarcely passed since the nuptial festivity, when Miss Armsby was called from a dream—in which she cut and sewed a light fabric, that took the shape of baby's caps, under her nimble fingers—to a sad reality, by a weeping figure at her bed side.

"It is me, Granny," said Mrs. Armsby; "wake up—wake up; my child is dying."

The piteous cry that broke from the mother's heart recalled Augusta to her waking senses; she hurried on her dressing gown while following her sister to the sick couch, where she read approaching bereavement, not only in the pale features of the dying girl, but in the sympathetic face of the physician who stood beside her.

"It is so at last; our darling is to go," she murmured, as Dr. Ormond quietly pressed her hand, and answered only by a sorrowful glance at Mrs. Armsby, who had lingered near the door.

Augusta bent over the invalid, who, as though she instinctively felt her presence, opened her languid eyes and rested them upon her. There was no evidence of pain in that gentle look, although but for a second the appearance of recognition was visible; then she turned away from the Granny's face, as though she knew it not, and looked wistfully about the room.

"There is some person or thing she misses," said the doctor, following her restless glance; "perhaps it is Lily."

Miss Armsby left the room weeping, and soon returned with the little girl, who knew almost before the Granny could explain, what was going on; and without a word, only stopping to throw a shawl over her shoulders, went to her dying friend and knelt beside her.

"Julia—dear Julia," she faltered, "speak to your little playmate; do you not know me?"

look—" she could not finish the sentence, for her voice was choked with tears when she saw the child turn her eyes from her, as she had done from each one who had bent over her.

"It is neither Augusta, Rosebud, nor Lily," remarked Dr. Ormond, perceiving that her eyes rested near the door, beside which Mrs. Armsby still sat, deaf to the entreaties of her husband to retire to her own room.

"Could it be me?" asked the father, advancing, and taking the wasted hand within his own; but she took no notice of his caress, and still the vacant look remained unsatisfied.

"Her mother, perhaps," suggested Augusta. But fearing to put her sister through such an ordeal, she endeavoured by other means to attract the child's attention, unavailingly. Mrs. Armsby, who had watched every movement beside the little couch, rose and stood beside her husband, who, pressing her to his heart, thus silently assuring her of his sympathy, asked her to speak to Julia.

At that moment the restless eye closed wearily, and the unhappy mother, believing that it was

death, broke from the arms that supported her, and, with a stifled cry, caught the emaciated form to her bosom.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, “not yet—not yet. Spare her a little longer—only a little longer.”

Julia turned her head from the tears that showered upon her, and again looked silently around the room; it was distressing to behold that wistful glance, and still not comprehend it. All felt this; yet no one could rectify the evil until Lily, clasping her hand with a sudden thought, ran from the apartment, and in a few moments the whining impatient bark of a dog was heard in the corridor, and a flush passed over the invalid's face as her playmate returned, holding Carlo's heavy chain with one hand, and patting him with the other.

“This is what she has been wanting,” said the doctor, turning in compassion from the grief and disappointment that came upon the mother's face at the poor child's preference of the dog to herself.

Carlo bounded beside his dying mistress, with a cry like the wail of a human heart, while she,

clasping her arms round his shaggy neck, rested her head upon it with a smile of contentment ; he moved not, but placing a paw across her hand, remained as still as the little form above him, until Augusta, raising the wan face, saw that the child had breathed her last upon the neck of her canine favourite. She laid the head back upon the pillow, and was about to put the dog away, when the faithful creature crouched at her feet with a sound between a bark and a growl, that pleaded to be left with her he had loved in life. She then turned from him in deeper pity towards her sister, who, sad and tearful, had felt herself thrust aside for the dumb animal, and saw her only child pass from her for ever, without one farewell kiss or a look of recognition to soothe her lonely sorrow.

Lily, concealed by the drapery of the bed, saw Mrs. Armsby borne insensible from her dead daughter ; the tender solicitude of the Granny, who sought to comfort the father's grief, as she folded the hands of the childish corpse across the breast. She saw the servants weeping and closing the door of the solitary chamber ; yet she

stood there, unable to move from her lifeless friend, with a heart bowed to the dust and a soul raised heavenward, which she felt, but did not understand. She bent closer to the marble face, and gazed until her tears fell heavily upon it; reverently she wiped them away, and, laying her head on the pillow, wept long beside it. She had no fear—no superstitious dread. She almost wondered if it could be death that she was so close to—no breath, nothing but a cold form laid out so quietly; no pain—no suffering; all was peace—all was over. And she would never more play with that little companion in the green fields—never more fondle the wan face that used to meet hers so pleadingly in her weakness. Lily wept afresh when she remembered that Julia was the only young friend that she had ever had; and in many after years that still form, lying so peacefully on her bed of death, was recalled as a fresh and tender memory, always to be cherished as we cherish the love of a true and gentle heart.

At last Lily was disturbed in her faithful vigils by a hasty confusion in the house, and sympathizing in her childish fashion with the bereaved

family; she pressed her lips to the lifeless ones before her, and with a parting caress on the watching Carlo, made her way towards Mrs. Arnsby's chamber, from whence the sound proceeded.

But three hours had passed since Julia's death, and a babe was ushered into the world, turning grief to joyful anxiety; even so recently after the flight of the little spirit that had been tenderly prized amongst them, the lost one was forgotten in the welfare of the young stranger—a fine boy, healthy and strong, though prematurely born, who screamed lustily for food. Those screams the Granny proclaimed a month afterwards to be the sweetest music she had ever listened to.

When fully apprised of what had occurred, Lily crept back to the lonely corpse; she thought it cruel of those who were so kind in the lifetime of that now breathless form, to leave it so entirely without one loving heart to watch beside it, except the affectionate Carlo, who, laying his head on Lily's lap, watched alternately her face and that of his dead mistress.

Lily was becoming acquainted with the world by learning that the dead is soon forgotten; but

it is wisely ordained that hope should never completely die out of the human heart, for although no parent could have been more sincerely attached to an offspring than was Mrs. Armsby to Julia, she bore her loss with fortitude, because her soul was filled with gratitude as her tearful eyes rested on the rosy cherub in the cot beside her. So the dead was carried to its last resting place in respectful sorrow, and when the father turned his back upon the tiny grave, the thought of another tender form rushed to his mind, and hope smiled again upon his soul when he stood near the couch of his young wife; where, after mingling a few tears with hers, he placed his son beside her, and twining his arms round them both, blessed God for the tie that bound them still so lovingly together.

Lily returned after a few days to Woodbine Cottage, where she found Mrs. Fairfield entreating her mother to accompany her for the night to Lilymount, which as yet she had never been persuaded to do.

"No; you must not ask me," said the widow.
"You would not if—if—"

"If what, dear mother," asked Lily, entering, and affectionately greeting them both; "if what? Oh! trust her, darling mother, for Mrs. Fairfield never would betray you, and go this once to Lily-mount."

"A thousand thanks, Lily," said Ella, bending her grey locks until they mingled with the golden ones of the little girl. "Now, Mrs. Lee, you cannot resist, surely. Trust me if you like with what she insinuates; but I will never force your confidence. Only come, as she says, this once to Lilymount, as Frederick has disappointed me, and I feel so lonely, oh! so very lonely to-night, for what reason I cannot account."

"Your brother may be with you yet," answered Florence. "Please do not urge me more."

"I know not what is tempting me to wish you to come home with me to-night, but I will desist, although I feel sure that Frederick will not be there, for I waited long past the appointed hour before I came here; forgive me if I have been too pressing, for I am nervous and strangely sad this evening."

Mrs. Fairfield, holding Lily's hand, had sunk upon her seat as she spoke, unable to overcome the strange uneasiness that had taken possession of her. She gave way to a bitter fit of weeping, while Florence sought to soothe her, until at length, shaking off the uncomfortable nervousness, she arose to depart. Feeling anxiety on her account, Mrs. Werter now insisted on accompanying her, and so the three walked leisurely to Lilymount.

CHAPTER II.

CONFIDENCE.

"Let our parting
Be full as charitable as our meeting was."

MIDDLETON.

THE night was moonlit, calm and beautiful, although a chilly air rustled through the myriad leaves above their heads, as Florence and Mrs. Fairfield walked side by side along the quiet pathway towards Lilymount, while the child kept a few paces in advance. They strolled along in thoughtful silence.

"Is your name Lee?" asked Ella, "for something tells me it is fictitious."

Florence staggered as if she had received a blow by the abruptness of the question, and looked at the earnest face before her in alarm.

"I see it is not," resumed the other; "yet whatever it be you need not fear; doubtless you have some good reason for the concealment of

the true one, which, pardon me if, through friendship for you, and interest in your little girl, I have discovered, not by carelessness on either of your parts, but from my own observations. I know your secret. You are the widow of Colonel Werter, and this place," she added, looking around, for they had reached the lawn, "this beautiful place was once your happy home. Why you do not like your real name to be known, I have no wish to fathom. It is enough for me to feel that you, a woman poor and lonely now, are as unhappy as myself. In this we two are kindred."

"You have ever been kind to me," returned Florence, "and I do not fear that you will reveal my secret even to your brother. I took the name of Lee that I might be hidden from one who sought to calumniate me, one who, to gratify a cowardly revenge, has vowed to hunt and persecute me; who now, not dreaming that I could be almost within his reach, searches for me in vain—thank heaven still in vain."

"What do you mean by saying that you are almost within his reach?"

"This dear spot," answered Mrs. Werter, "this dear old home now belongs to him, mortgaged in my husband's life time."

"To him—to him who has vowed to persecute you, as you say? Can this be possible? Can so mean a spirit be lurking in the breast of Frederick's friend?"

"If he be your brother's friend," said Florence, "then Heaven help you both."

"Do you mean Mr. Fitzroy?"

"The same," answered the widow, "for he who betrayed one friend can treat another likewise. He was the intimate associate of Colonel Werter; he sought to injure his wife, schemed for the destruction of both; succeeded, as you see, too well. He would drive me from the humble hearthstone yonder, as he did from Lilymount, if he knew that I had taken refuge there. He possesses the resources of unlimited wealth and wickedness. I am but a poor and helpless creature. If he be regarded by your brother, or he regard Mr. Norcott in the light of friendship, break the bond between them, if it may not be too late already."



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Mr. Werier, "the
him, mortgaged

...and to permeate
possible? Can
in the heart of

Small Town

[Faint handwritten notes]

by every means in his power to make up in my almost infant mind the great loss of our childhood. My mother, at her death, bequeathed us to the care of her only brother and his wife, with whom we became indulged and petted favourites; indeed, it were difficult to say whether my aunt or uncle lavished the most care and attention upon us, for I could not remember a single act of theirs that was not marked with extreme kindness. I used to fancy that I was preferred to Frederick, for if a shade of deeper tenderness could be detected it was shown to me, for whom my uncle had many fantastic appellations, among which was "bonny raven," a name even now most dear to me, and by which I became known in his household. My every whim was gratified, even with a lavish expenditure, and I, who knew nothing about the value of money, set no value upon it. Gold was not spared upon my education, which, however, was not drawn from my fortune, but from Sir Gordon's coffers."

"Who was Sir Gordon?" asked Florence, for Ella had paused and looked towards Lily in the moonlight.

“My uncle; but the reaping up of those olden times is a harder task than I had fancied.”

“Then let them be forgotten,” urged the widow.

“But why do you look at Lily?”

“Because,” answered Mrs. Fairfield, “I was such as she is now, when an event occurred in our little family that gave a colouring to my future lot. It was the arrival of a cousin, who was about the age of Frederick, and who, having just become an orphan like ourselves, was left to the guardianship of Sir Gordon Travers. George and I became almost inseparable—not that I preferred his society, but that we seemed to understand each other better; however, this idea wore away with the novelty of his first appearance, and I returned to my former allegiance to Frederick with redoubled fervour, who at first was disposed to resent my desertion, but as he never bore anger long against his little sister, he forgave me, and all the world beside was almost forgotten in the affection we bore each other. Why—why do I linger on my happy childhood, or speak of a devotion but too ill requited? suffice it that

had I been content with my brother's love, he and I would have been happier now. The first eight or nine years of my life passed away in uninterrupted felicity. Our family circle was at last broken by my brother and cousin going to college, after which I departed to a boarding-school; but we often met in the long and frequent vacations, without which our relatives would not have consented to be parted from us. It was during one of these that I became aware of a rumour circulated in the household, which was that 'the young raven' and Master George Travers were destined for one another, and I soon discovered such to be the wishes of our aunt and uncle; for before I was fifteen a solemn engagement had been entered into between all parties, and I was betrothed to my cousin. George was a handsome, engaging youth, often rivalling me in the affections of those who knew us both; indeed, it were impossible not to like and admire the open-hearted, generous young man, and I thought myself fortunate in the choice that I had made. About this time my brother, whose affection for

me had been the one-absorbing feeling of his existence, grew reckless in his conduct, and extravagant in his expenditure."

"Perhaps he did not like your engagement," suggested the widow.

"He did," returned Mrs. Fairfield, "for he loved and respected George as he would have done a good and upright brother; however, before this he and I had been all in all to each other, and I know he looked upon it at first with a jealous eye. I know that Mr. Travers regarded me as a sister, for his love was neither deep nor passionate; and oh! I thank God that it was so, for else my deceit would have ruined a noble life, and my falsehood have corrupted a brave young nature, for my broken vows would have blighted the beautiful, trusting love of a true heart. No, no, he did not love his affianced wife, and this thought has been the one redeeming memory of all my wretched past. Two months after our betrothal George and Frederick returned to college, the latter to complete his professional studies, for although possessing an ample fortune, his active mind could not then be satisfied without employ-

ment, and he chose the science of medicine as a source of intellectual pleasure rather than for any mercenary gain. Alas ! he soon gave up that, along with every other beneficial or improving pursuit, I left home almost at the same time, to take up my abode in a London seminary, for the benefit of studying with French and Italian masters. There I frequently heard from my affianced, but his letters were only filled with fears for my brother, whose dissipation became the theme of remark, even among the wildest students whose follies he outstripped. Rumour bore those evil tidings to Sir Gordon, whose remonstrance, and my aunt's, were of no avail, even joined by my entreaties, for each account was more terrible than the last, and I felt the bitter pang of knowing that a beloved brother was on the road to ruin, and would not be recalled by virtue or affection. Heaven knows that his wickedness should have been a sorrow deep enough for my kind relatives to bear, without being added to by mine."

She ceased, overcome by emotion, while her companion asked her to postpone the further recital of what gave her such suffering.

"No," replied Mrs. Fairfield; "it is a task that I have volunteered to impose upon myself, and it will do me good when it is over—for years the bitter feelings of remorse and grief have lain silently upon my unburthened heart, and when I pour out its depths to you, it may not press so heavily.—The principal of the seminary in which I resided was a person of polished manners, and rather genteel appearance. She had one son—we met; I thought at first by chance, but afterwards learned it was by the manœuvring of his clever mother; at all events we met, and then I knew how little I had liked my affianced husband, for my heart, the moment it heard the tones of Edmond Fairfield's voice, bounded with a new life and passion that intoxicated me with its happiness. He was handsome, lively, and accomplished, possessing the outward glitter of fascination that could scarcely fail to dazzle the fancy of a romantic school girl. They knew me to be an heiress to possess thirty thousand pounds by my father's will, which I was to receive on my wedding day. By the contrivance of Edmond's mother we met not only frequently, but in a

month after our first acquaintance she helped us to contract a private marriage. I would have written to ask the consent of my guardians, but Mrs. Fairfield urged me to the contrary, as my engagement to my cousin would have prevented them hearing of another union for me: this was enough to deter me from my purpose, for I recoiled now from the idea of wedding George with absolute horror. I fled with my young husband to the continent, from whence I wrote to inform my relatives of the step that I had taken, pleading my betrothal to one whom I had never loved as an excuse for not having done so before my hasty bridal, and begging their forgiveness. It was a month before they replied; their letter was filled with sorrow, and the only reproach that it contained was to say that my cruelty had driven Frederick to deeper ruin—he had cast me off, he had become a drunkard, incurring debts of the wildest extravagance, after spending his own fortune, and left Sir Gordon to liquidate them as he might. I next wrote to my brother, but received no reply; I met with as little success from both my aunt and uncle, who, after they had re-

mitted my fortune through our solicitor, took no farther notice of any further application addressed to them. I had made over all my wealth to my husband, which, with the interest that had accumulated since my childhood, was considerable: I did not reserve even pin money. We returned to England, and found that Sir Gordon and Lady Travers had left the country, well nigh heart broken at our ingratitude. Of my brother or cousin I could obtain no tidings. Yet bitter as was my grief at losing the affection of my relatives, it was soon forgotten in the idolatry I felt for my husband, who appeared to return it with sincerity. Ah! how I loved him; —my love was idolatry, for I grew jealous of his very looks, jealous if he spoke to another, or almost if he left my side; always basking in his presence, and paining my heart with a thousand fears for his safety when he was absent. Eight months of wedded life passed happily, when one day we went to a fancy fair, and then all was changed. Oh! would that we had never gone. It was all bustle and confusion to me, but to Edmond the scene was amusing; and I forced myself to enjoy it,

as I did everything that gave him pleasure, until I saw his gaze so frequently directed to one particular spot, that mine followed and rested on a graceful form—a lady leaning upon a gentleman, who was evidently her father. I could not distinguish her features, for every time my eyes took the direction of Edmond's, they were either hidden by the crowd, or turned from me : once I got a glimpse of her profile, which was young and lovely, enough to arouse the jealousy against which I fought incessantly, by endeavouring to reason myself out of ; but imagine my astonishment when my husband, calling a friend of his, who had but once been at our house, for we never received company, and, leaving me under his protection, bowed in silence, and went away. I thought my heart would burst when I looked upon his receding form, and the tears must have started from my eyes, for my companion, who was to me almost a stranger, sought to cover my agitation by drawing my attention to several things of note ; but his kindness was lost upon me, for nothing could divert my mind from Edmond's extraordinary conduct. I saw him making his way

towards a young baronet, to whom I remember him to have lent some of my money, and who seemed now to greet him more graciously than ever I knew him to do before. They remained a few minutes in conversation, and then I saw the gentleman link his arm through my husband's, and advance to the girl and her father; an introduction evidently took place, for she bowed, although with extreme coldness. Edmond lingered by her, and escorted them from the fair, leaving me all the time with Mr. Campbell.

"I see you sympathise with me, kind friend," continued Ella, "for you have grown quite pale, but the worst is yet to come. Alas! from that hour Edmond was not the same; instead of lauding my appearance, he found fault with every dress I wore,—said that I was too pale and quiet to look well in anything, and often returned home intoxicated. I remonstrated, wept and prayed, and poured out my heart's deepest love at his feet, but he was hard and deaf to all that I could urge. Soon he—oh! how the words sticks in my heart—he struck me, reviling and laughing to scorn my blinded passion, even when I prayed for

pity for my unborn babe—day and night he tortured me with a thousand tortures. Oh! I would not, I could not tell to mortal what I have suffered from that man,—what agony tore my heart strings, until I lay upon a couch of sickness, from which, had it been the will of heaven, would that I had never risen, for when I awoke to consciousness I found a sleeping infant on my bosom—my little Hatty. Ah! why did the grave not cover both of us then? for I was left to myself in the care of menials, who, using me roughly, refused to tell the whereabouts of the husband who had deserted me? I have never seen Edmond Fairfield since.”

Mrs. Werter had buried her face in her hands as her companion proceeded, and now her sobs recalled her.

“Your sympathy soothes me,” said Mrs. Fairfield; “but pray be calm until I unburden all my heart to you at once. No, I have never seen him since he gained possession of my fortune; so I arose from that bed of suffering and sorrow to find myself penniless and alone, for my relatives had gone I knew not whither, and if I did,

dare not acquaint them of my misery. Of Frederick I knew nothing, except that he was sunk in the deepest degradation. I sent to my mother-in-law, and found for the first time that she died a couple of months after her son and I were united, and the school passed into the possession of others.

“He had never told me of his mother’s demise, and scarcely had I discovered this new deception when the furniture of the house was seized for rent, and I knew not where to lay my head. In this dilemma my brother stood before me as if by magic; he had heard of my husband’s desertion, and came to offer me the only asylum he possessed, a poverty-stricken garret on the outskirts of London; but beautified by brotherly love, for Frederick at once reformed from his evil habits, lavished all the affection of a noble nature upon his wretched sister, and endeavoured, as he had done in childhood, to supply the vacant place of my heart. It would have been a double ingratitude for me not to make the best of my position then, and ignore as much as possible the past dream of my false happiness.

“Frederick was reformed; my presence had worked a miracle, and that was a blessing in itself. If by chance he earned a shilling in any menial capacity, for he could not obtain it by any other means, it was thrown unchanged into my lap with triumph. Stifling any overflowing of my wretched soul I went about in a worn cotton gown, tidying his humble domicile, in which I stretched my aching limbs at night beside my child, and rising early to prepare the scanty meal which neither of us would eat, but make a show of doing that one might have enough. We were reduced to the extremest poverty, for Frederick had failed to obtain employment, however humble.

“One morning I languidly raised my head from the straw pallet and craved for food, not for myself, but for my infant, whose natural nourishment had ceased; there was not even a crust of bread available and Frederick rushed from me like a maniac. That night he returned with gold; not stolen as I at first had fancied, but given him by his generous benefactor, Mr. Fitzroy, through whom he soon afterwards obtained the

situation he now holds; he has since bestowed Lilymount upon us as a recompense for faithful services.

“That was Frederick’s first meeting with the man you would have him avoid. I suppose the misery that was stamped upon my poor brother’s appearance, as he stood like one contemplating suicide on London Bridge, must have attracted the gentleman’s attention, for he accosted and aided him. Need I say that such help was also welcome to me. I have never seen Mr. Fitzroy, because I could not bear to look upon the face of a stranger; but bless him all the same for his kindness to us. Here Frederick has installed Hatty and myself in ease and comfort, which I can never more enjoy, since I know it should be yours. Dear Mrs. Werter, to befriend you would be a great happiness, since it might atone a little for this usurpation, and—”

“That can never be,” interrupted Florence; “so think no more of it. Have you never since heard anything of your guardians?”

“No; but Frederick has instituted enquiries, and he may be successful.”

"And the fair—the fancy fair," asked Mrs. Werter; "was it long ago?"

"Six years back," answered Ella, slowly.

"Six years—only six years—and then you were a young and happy wife, while now your head is well nigh grey."

"With suffering and sorrow," said Mrs. Fairfield. "If even Edmond were to see me now, he would fail to recognise in the faded, white haired woman, the girl he wedded not seven years past yet."

"Yes, you are changed most sadly; but the fancy fair—where and when was it?"

"At Dover," replied Ella, "in July—the date six years ago. But why do you ask? Perhaps you also have some reminiscences of that fatal fair?"

"None—none," said her friend, rising hastily, "except indeed that it was a fatal fair—fatal to you at least, poor Mrs. Fairfield. But I am chilled and weary; let me return to my cottage, for I could not rest at Lilymount to-night. Yet one more question. That man who gazed so rudely at the strange lady in the crowd, who left

you in the care of a gentleman you scarcely knew, that man was your husband, the Edmond Fairfield who wedded you not seven years ago."

"Yes."

The word almost hissed through Ella's teeth.

"Forgive me if I be too inquisitive; it is because I take a deep interest in you—heaven only knows how much and deeply I feel your wrongs. Tell me if Mr. Norcott has ever seen this Mr. Fairfield?"

"Never, never," answered the wife; "heaven forbid, for he would tear him limb from limb for the wrong he had done me."

"And the owner of Lilymount, this Mr. Fitzroy, is a good friend to you, and the benefactor of your brother. Oh! strange and inscrutable are the ways of Providence. I feel that a retribution is preparing for Edmond Fairfield, your runaway husband."

"Oh! say not so. I would not have him harmed for the world. I would have him happy, happy always, my poor Edmond."

"But if on the day of that fancy fair," resumed the widow, "a wild infatuation had taken posses-

sion of your husband's heart for that stranger lady which drove your image from its rightful place, would you not wish some evil to befall her?"

"Yes, that I would, if she encouraged his passion, knowing that he was sacredly bound to another; for then she must have been a wicked person, whom I could hate and wish dead, as then Edmond might think of me again, but I am weak and foolish. Alas! it may be that the lady knew not he was wedded to another, and for aught I know they both are happy in each other's fancied truth."

"Hush, hush," cried Florence, "think not so, no, no. I feel that were impossible, you need not wonder at my warmth—the lady may have been married also, and even if she were not, might never have loved your Mr. Fairfield."

"Not love him," echoed Ella, "not have loved Edmond. Oh! that were impossible," she paused, then added, thoughtfully; "Dear Mrs. Werter, I grieve much to learn that Mr. Fitzroy, who is so true a friend to us, could be the vile traducer of a defenceless woman's name—is there some mistake?"

"No, there could be none. And the time may come when you shall see your husband once again. You smile as though you wished it. Ah ! my poor friend, women are ever much too constant. Good night now, and it is almost night indeed ; sleep in peace, for you will need repose."

"I thought you were to have remained at Lilymount to night, surely my confidence has not chased you from me?"

"No," returned the widow, and with the monosyllable, she wrung her friend's hand, pressed her lips to the grey locks, and beckoning Lily, hurried from the lawn. The little girl wondered, as they went home, what could make her mother weep so bitterly.

"She has enough of her own sorrow," thought Ella, as she entered the house ; "and I have been selfish in troubling her with mine."

CHAPTER III.

A. DENOUNCEMENT.

"Then the virtuous wife
Shines in the full meridian of her truth,
And claims her part of sorrow,"

HAYARD'S CHARLES I.

For once Mr. Fitzroy found the power of wealth unavailing against the position that virtue can ever base itself upon, for lavish it as he might, he could neither track the path that Mrs. Werter had taken, nor discover her whereabouts. He had little doubt that she had found friends, who would endeavour to screen her from him, in which there was little chance of their succeeding, determined as he was to get her into his power; not by force, for from such the laws of England would protect her, but by the low devices of his most wicked cunning.

"For," he reasoned to himself, "if she refuses to be mine, by a few words gabbled over by a

priest in vestments, if she will not accept my hand in the bond that she considers holy, now that she is a free, unfettered woman, it must be hate that keeps her back. Well, we shall see which can hate the stronger; were I to follow her to the end of this vast universe, she shall be mine, in spite of all laws, human or divine—mine, ha! ha! I swear it now as I have sworn it before, and then the humiliation of her proud spirit shall follow on the footsteps of my revenge.”

Mr. Fitzroy's soliloquy was interrupted by a gentle tap at his office door, and John having entered, respectfully handed a letter to his master, who, tearing it open with more impatience than was his wont, found it to contain but a few lines written in, as he imagined for the moment, an unknown hand.

“DEAR AND KIND FRIEND,

“It is with the deepest grief and anxiety that I write to tell you of my poor brother's dangerous illness. On his arrival here, at an unusually late hour last evening, he was

attacked by paralysis. I would not take the liberty of troubling you with this intelligence, but that immediately before his being seized with the fit, he mentioned that he had a business appointment with you at ten o'clock in the morning, which must now be unavoidably broken. Hoping, kind sir, that this will in no way interfere with your arrangements,

“ I am, yours gratefully,

“ E. FAIRFIELD.

“ P.S.—Please excuse my brother's absence to his employers.

“ Lilymount, three o'clock, a.m.”

E. Fairfield was a common name enough. E might stand for Emma, Eliza, Ernestina and many other female appellations; while Fairfield was a name with which he had been familiar all his life. Yet Fitzroy's eyes were riveted on the paper as though fascinated by a basilisk. Then smiling scornfully, he thrust it into his pocket, signing for John to leave him. When alone he re-read the little note, and compared the writing

with a few rose tinted letters he took from a desk. They were exquisitely written, while the one just received, evidently guided by a trembling hand, was exactly the reverse, yet one bore a strange similitude to the other.

“Even if it be so,” he muttered, convulsively clutching the missive, “my lucky genius will help me out of it; and this Norcott, this tool whom I can wield at will is so near of kin, how strange it all seems. What if he should die? he was always squeamish of conscience, and if death starts up before him now, all would be lost. For the weak fool could not bid adieu to this world with such a secret on his soul. Yet in paralysis the patient seldom has the power of speech, and if he should die suddenly and swiftly it would be the more convenient for me.”

Again he referred to the paper, saying, “Lilymount, which I made over as an inheritance to him for faithful services—faithful, well we shall see. But is he much attached to this sister, if so, perhaps even now a confidence exists between them. Yet, no, no, in that there would be danger to himself, and he

loves his own safety most profoundly—three o'clock, a.m. This must have been written last night, or rather this morning, and perhaps ere this Norcott is no more—Norcott, that name has often struck me, seldom as I had heard it then, but now combined with E. Fairfield, the suspicion I have had since his features became familiar to me is well nigh confirmed. But why did he never mention her. True, true, he never would tell me anything about himself. I would not pause a second in my purpose, even if it were so, but will repair to Lilymount this moment."

He rang the bell, and John as usual made his appearance to receive his masters orders.

"The carriage, speedily," he said, quietly laying down a newspaper and speaking slowly.

Meantime Florence Werter had hurried to her home, after being taken into the confidence of Mrs. Fairfield, as though the greater the space she could put between them the better for both. It was long before midnight when she was aroused—not from her slumbers, for sleep refused its refreshing balm—but from a restless bed, by a loud ring at the garden bell. With some hesi-

tation she dressed, and answered the summons; it was a servant from Lilymount, who scarcely waited to utter her message.

"Oh! madam," she exclaimed, "come to my poor mistress, for heaven's sake," and with a gesture of impatience fled away almost as she spoke.

"Mrs. Fairfield is ill, she may be dying without a friend beside her," thought Florence; perplexed at the girl's disappearance, she followed, bare-headed and scarcely dressed, leaving Lily trembling against the door unable to move a step. When she entered the parlour of Lilymount, she found Frederick Norcott stretched like a corpse upon the floor, while Ella knelt beside him weeping, and chafing his hands in consternation; Mrs. Werter at once said he should be laid upon his bed and professional aid called in. But it was some time before she could comprehend his sister's incoherent explanation of his illness.

Mr. Norcott had come to Lilymount almost immediately after Mrs. Fairfield, who, having given up all expectation of his arrival, had gone

over to Woodbine Cottage; and while the friends were in the harbour busy with the past, Frederick was in a room not many paces from them waiting Ella's return. She was, of course, surprised to see him, and doubly regretted his absence on hearing that his delay that evening had been occasioned by a faintness which seized him on the way thither.

"I saw," continued Ella, "that he still suffered, for he refused all refreshment, and as he stood up to wish me good night, fell at my feet in the state you see him now."

The medical men were not dilatory in attendance, and hope was given for the recovery of the beloved patient. Florence could not find it in her heart to leave her friend, and wrote to the parents of each of her pupils claiming a holiday; after which she composed herself to share the labours of the sick room with the nurse and Ella.

About five o'clock a change came over Mr. Norcott's features—intelligence in his eyes, and his lips moved slowly. Ella bent over him to listen, but no sound escaped them, and he only

looked at his arms, lying powerless upon his breast, while seeming to comprehend what had occurred.

Hour after hour went by without further amendment until the clock struck ten, and with its last stroke a look of intense uneasiness came upon his face. Ella again bent forward, and his eyes turned towards a writing-desk that lay upon a table opposite the bed. She knew instantly what he wanted, and told him that she had already written to his benefactor to account for his non-appearance, at which his countenance brightened.

At twelve o'clock the physicians paid a second visit, and expressing their gratification at having their directions so scrupulously carried out, pronounced the patient to be much better, while poor Ella's heart hung upon the words of those practised hope-givers, watching their very forming on the careless lips that uttered them.

Not long after the medical men's disappearance, a sharp tap came to the door of the chamber where Frederick lay a helpless mass of humanity. Florence moved silently forward and opened it,

but she recoiled again, covering her face with her hands, and suppressing a cry that rushed from her heart to her lips, while Mr. Fitzroy himself, astonished at finding such an unexpected apparition, came hurriedly to Norcott's side. But there a scream long and terrible pierced upon the sick man's ear that almost caused the placid limbs to quiver. Fitzroy turned and confronted Ella Fairfield with a look of defiant scorn.

"Edmond! Oh! my husband," she exclaimed, clinging wildly to him. "Edmond Fairfield, thank God that we have met again, and you will never leave me more. Oh! how my heart has ached to look upon you thus; no, not thus, for you turn from me in coldness. Perhaps you do not know me with this grey hair, and yet I am the poor girl who always loved you—your wife, your miserable and deserted wife."

With a gesture of impatience, Fitzroy threw her hands from his arm. Villain though he was, he was neither prepared for this reception nor for the presence of Florence, and had not the strength to brazen out Ella's claim as he had fancied. But as he turned his gaze from the pleading face

before him, his eye encountered those of Mrs. Werter, and the expression of scornful triumph that shot from hers nerved him for a deeper wickedness.

Drawing Mrs. Fairfield closer to the light, as the room was partially darkened for the comfort of the sick man, he addressed her with calmness.

"Who are you," he asked, "who accosts me with an unmeaning harangue, the well-wisher of Mr. Norcott?"

"Oh! Edmond," she answered, trembling visibly, "do not seek to disown me, the wife whom you forsook; but that is all forgiven now. You cannot shake me off, for I am still your own. I have your child safe. Hatty, where is she? Here, here Edmond, your child and mine."

She caught the little girl, and held her towards Fitzroy, as she continued—

"Ah! you do not even yet recognise your young bride in the altered grey-haired woman who now stands before you. Look upon me. I forgive every thing, only love me once again, and all the past shall be forgotten—all

except its happiness, for it was great. Look upon me, and believe it was the loss of you that withered up my youth, and blanched my head as now you see it."

"Peace! You must be a maniac or you could not take me to be your husband. Who or what are you, that you thus attack a stranger, who seeks an interview with a sick friend? Away! I do not know you."

"Edmond Fairfield, this—this is more cruel than all the rest. Do not cast me from you, for I am your wife, that Eleanor Norcott who gave her heart to you a few short years ago, God help me, only a few short years ago."

"Fool, idiot, what has Edmond Fairfield to do with me. Me, Mr. Fitzroy, who saved your brother from starvation, who—"

"Helped him to the gallows," added a voice from the corridor.

The usurer started as if stung by an adder, then rushed to the door, but all there was still, and apparently tenantless.

"Helped to the gallows," repeated Ella, "what was that which said those awful words?"

You, Edmond Fairfield, to help him, Frederick Norcott, to the gallows; he, whose heart you crushed by ruining mine. Oh! speak, if you be a man, and tell me what was that which said those bitter words."

She clung to her husband as she spoke, while Hatty, having disengaged herself from her mother's arms, stood frowningly apart, until a low guttural sound proceeded from the bed. Each turned instinctively in the direction, and found Frederick's eyes rivetted upon them with a glassy stare, his features haggard and distorted, while blood oozed from his purple lips.

He had comprehended all that passed. Before him stood the man who tempted him to crime—the villain who had trampled on the hopes of her for whose sake he had steeped his soul in guilt; yet there he lay, unable to move a limb, with the fire of vengeance in his heart, and the brand of wrong maddening his burning brain.

Oh! for the strength to kill the tempter as thus he stood by his bed side—to fell him with a blow from his avenging arm, and gloat over his

dying pangs, which he would prolong to the years of misery he had caused his sister.

Frederick would have sold himself, body and soul, to everlasting torment if he could have then and there tasted the sweets of such revenge, but, helpless as an infant, his limbs refused to move, and he could only send forth those horrible sounds in his wild fury and despair.

Forcing his eyes from the convulsed form on the bed, and tearing himself from the grasp of his unfortunate wife, Fairfield looked round the apartment in quest of Florence, but in vain, for she had disappeared the moment after their eyes met in open defiance and scorn. Then reading the countenance of each one before him, finding love where he wished it not, and hate where most he feared it, he hurried from the room, deaf to the shriek of hopeless misery that issued from the lips of his injured wife, the sharp angry looks of his unknown child, and the horrid inarticulate mutterings of his stricken dupe.

Exhausted and weeping, Mrs. Fairfield gazed after the retreating form of her husband, then,

like one awaking from a bewildering dream to actual sorrow, went to her brother's bed, wiped the froth from his lips, and summoning the nurse to his side, noticed for the first time the absence of Florence.

The unfortunate lady thought not that, as she poured her tale of sorrow the previous night into the ear of her friend, she was revealing the secrets of a slighted wife to the rival who had, unconsciously, wrought her so much injury; or that Mrs. Werter had discovered in Edmond Fairfield her own detested suitor. Accounting for the absence of the widow by believing that she did not wish to intrude herself upon a scene at once so humiliating and sacred, Mrs. Fairfield sought her in an adjoining room. Florence was seated at a table writing, which the tears that streamed down her cheeks greatly impeded, and not noticing the entrance of her friend, she continued her occupation until a hand was laid upon her arm. Starting, yet not endeavouring to hide what she had written, she merely bowed her head in silence.

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dence; and the lady I saw at the fancy fair was Florence Werter, who leaned on her husband's, not her father's arm, as I had imagined. Strange—strange; and this woman is the only friend I now have in all the wide, wide world.”

“Oh! call me so still,” exclaimed Florence, raising her tearful eyes. “Do not hate me; it was not my fault. Your husband was my enemy, and if you withdraw your friendship from me, I will be forlorn indeed.”

Mrs. Fairfield placed her hand upon the head of Florence, and peering into her face as though she had never seen it before, continued—“And this is the beauty, these the charms he left me for; this the heart beating so near mine own he could not win. Ah! poor Edmond, I scarce can blame him. No; Florence Werter, it is not your fault to be so beautiful. He could not help loving you; yet it was most cruel of Edmond to leave me so, while my heart lived but for his—” She stopped suddenly, and a violent shudder pervaded her frame; hitherto her manner had been the personification of a calm despair, but as she ceased speaking she darted a look of terrible

vivacity upon Florence, and after pacing the room with hurried steps, stood again before her. Mrs. Werter, alarmed, rose and endeavoured to soothe her evident agitation.

"Stop—stop," she cried, "and tell me if you heard that voice—the awful voice in the corridor?"

Florence, trembling for the sanity of the wretched woman, replied in the negative.

"You will swear it," said her companion, "swear that you heard not the voice in the corridor?"

"My dear Mrs. Fairfield, I do not understand what you speak of, and I do declare most solemnly that I never heard any voice in the corridor."

Without replying, Mrs. Fairfield again took up the letter which Florence had concluded to be the most expedient means of conveying to her the explanation she would no longer conceal relative to Fitzroy; and Ella, after again glancing over its contents, tore it into a thousand fragments.

"Thus," she said, "thus all rivalry will end

between us, and friendship alone find a place in my heart for you."

She extended her hand, which Florence pressed for a second within her own. Then they repaired to the sick room.

Finding the blood still oozing slowly from the lips of Frederick, Ella was roused at last to energy, for, with a bitter self reproach at having deserted him, even for the few moments she had been in the adjoining apartment, she was about giving fresh directions to the nurse, when the medical men arrived. They pronounced that the invalid had not only received a violent shock, but must have suffered under the most intense excitement, for a blood vessel was broken, and the strictest care and quiet should be preserved, or they could not answer for the consequence.

Mrs. Fairfield listened to the alarming diagnosis with a strange apathy, which she in vain endeavoured to shake off. She felt that if the world were crumbling beneath her feet she could scarcely make an effort to save herself. Her heart had received a death-hurt, and all minor

injuries were as nothing now ; she had seen Edmond again, and he had spurned her. What matter now whether Frederick should die or not ! To look upon her husband once more had been the prayer of her existence ; and now that he had come and gone like a flash of light, she felt as though she had no other aim in life.

Night wore on apace, and the patient, slumbering quietly, appeared to progress favourably ; then Mrs. Fairfield, faint from exhaustion, placed her head upon the pillows beside her brother as she sat, and fell asleep. But forgetfulness lasted only a few moments, and she awoke with a sudden start to find Florence seated opposite to her almost like a statue, so intense was her desire not to disturb them. At first she imagined the events of the last few hours to be the remembrance of a horrible dream, but slowly and painfully distinct each word uttered by her husband beat separately upon her brain, while his looks and gestures rose before her memory with a cold and suffocating feeling of woe.

Florence watched every movement of Ella's, and seeing her gasp convulsively, while a deadly

paleness overspread her countenance, sprang forward and caught her as she was falling in unconsciousness upon the floor; with the assistance of the nurse, she was laid upon a sofa and soon restored. Her friend knelt beside her, and as Ella turned her head with a languid smile, she besought her to weep, for the wretched wife had not shed a tear during all the agony she had so lately passed through.

"Weep," repeated Mrs. Fairfield; "tears soften anguish. What could soothe mine; they refresh the heart. Mine is old and worn out. No—no; I could not weep, for there remains not a single tear that I could shed. That time has passed."

"Then rest," urged her companion; "sleep will soothe and calm you."

"Rest," replied Ella, "rest is for the happy; sleep seldom visits the suffering mind. Oblivion seldom comes to those who would forget; and what can soothe a heart, tortured with the last rending of its dearest ties? No, no; I could not sleep or weep—but let me think. Edmond and I have met and parted; he has spurned me—his

looks were full of hatred. Oh! what have I done to deserve it from him? Yet he hates me; that is my greatest wrong. Then, Hatty—his child is dying. Yes; I see it in every hour of her young life. It is going out—fading, passing away like a happy dream; and then, oh! worse than all—that voice in the corridor, which you say you did not hear; its sound is now throbbing painfully upon my brain, like the knell of death. Feel how my brow burns. Ah! how could you bid me weep, for would not that fire scorch up all the tears that were ever wrung from mortal anguish. How sweetly Frederick slumbers; he is better, no doubt. Yet, oh! great Heaven, how can he sleep? I will wake him up; I must wake him up, for he shall not sleep.”

She leaped wildly to her feet, and was rushing towards the bed, when the nurse caught her in her arms, and placing her hand over her lips, carried her from the room in silence. Florence followed, after seeing the unhappy lady again sink into a swoon, then flew to Hatty's room and returned with the little girl. The terrified child clung screaming to her mother's neck, and in a

...the moment of suspense, spring fair-
weather might be a service doing a uncon-
...the heart, with the assistance of
...and soon re-
...and as Ella
...with a languid smile, she be-
...for the wretched wife had
...all the agony she had so
...and

"Weep," repeated Mrs. Fairfield; "tears
soothe the heart. Mine is old and worn out.
No—no; I could not weep, for there remains not
a single tear that I could shed. That time has
passed."

"Then rest," urged her companion; "sleep
will soothe and calm you."

"Rest," replied Ella. "rest is for the happy;
sleep—sleep visits the suffering mind. Oblivion
what can soothe a heart, tortured with the last
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"Then you propose to leave Lilymount for a time?"

"Yes, for ever," he replied.

Mrs. Fairfield had quitted the apartment a moment previously, and Florence believing that she had made her brother acquainted with the particulars of her incognito, resumed—"This is a double bereavement to me, by which I shall lose a friend, and for a second time, a dear old home. The privilege of Mrs. Fairfield's friendship was scarcely a less pleasure than the sweet associations of this house—in the corner where your chair now is placed I have often sat, while Colonel Werter either read to me, or chatted gaily of the hopes that he was destined never to behold realized—over that mantle-piece once hung my husband's picture. But now—ah! I am very selfish to trouble you with these vain repinings, but when you leave Lilymount it will be a sad change for me."

"Then," stammered Frederick, "I am to understand that you are not Mrs. Lee—but—but—"

"Mrs. Werter," added Florence; "yes, has not Mrs. Fairfield told you so?"

"No, I am much surprised now—I am a little bewildered I think, for this attack has not yet quite left my brain; you are then the widow of—of Colonel Werter?"

"Yes, I am that unfortunate person."

For a moment the young man bowed his face in his hands with an expression of acute suffering.

"You will pardon me," he said, "I am very weak, and find myself unable to bear even the conversation of my sister's only friend—may God bless you for your kindness to her, for the rest, forget that you have ever seen us." He endeavoured to rise, but fell back faintly on the pillows. Florence flew to his assistance. He caught her hand, and pressed it to his lips; she felt his tears upon it, and glanced questioningly into his eyes. "Pardon me," he again murmured, "for I am very weak, God help me, very weak—where is my sister?"

Mrs. Werter rang the bell by the mantle-piece, and when Ella entered and saw her brother lying

like a dying man upon his chair, hastened to hold a stimulant to his lips, which, having the desired effect, she shortly after assisted in having him removed to his chamber.

“ He must have got a sudden relapse,” Ella remarked an hour afterwards when she rejoined Florence, who had waited in the drawing room for the opinion of the physicians.

“ Heaven grant that the morning will bring us better news,” answered Mrs. Werter, “ and now good-bye. I shall see you as usual to-morrow night.”

Mrs. Fairfield, after watching Mrs. Werter until she was hidden from her view in the darkness of a chill autumnal night, returned despondingly to her brother's side, but scarcely had she reached it, when shrill screams and cries for help proceeded from the lawn. Frederick started up to a sitting posture in mute terror, and his sister flew to the window, but was unable to pierce the gloom of all outside, and still the cries continued.

“ It is the villain,” gasped Frederick at last, “ he has seized her. Oh ! heaven give but strength

to my limbs that I may save her now and die."

"Frederick, be calm, be quiet. Promise that you will not move, and I will save her."

"Move," he repeated. "Alas! I cannot."

She glanced upon his tear-stained face, then, with an injunction that the nurse should redouble her vigilance in her absence, left the chamber to arouse the servants; but they were already on the alert, for they had been awakened by the noise, and as the screams increased all hastened in their direction. Suddenly they ceased, and the sound of hurried footsteps was heard farther down the lawn; while Ella, urging on her two domestics, followed in their track; but neither discovering the signs of a struggle having taken place, or finding any clue to the alarm, she beckoned them forward, and ran speedily to Woodbine Cottage. On arriving at the little gate she found all within as dark and silent as a tomb.

roy is my name, by which I was honestly christened—Edmond Fitzroy Fairfield; but as it came between the other two, Eleanor had never heard it during our brief union. Yes, it was Mrs. Werter that stood like a creature of my own imagination before me as I entered Norcott's room, for I scarce had time to recover from my surprise when she vanished. One thing certain, she waited long enough to hear that soft fool address me as her husband, and by her triumphant looks I know that she has learned all. But this will not deter me, for I have sworn to be upon her track, go where she will; that I will persecute and hunt her, that she shall feel the fervour of my hate, and I will keep my vow. I tell you, Harriett Thompson, that vengeance upon the woman, who has reviled and scorned me, is the dearest aim of all my life, and that no power can keep me from."

"You love her still; it is love, not hate that goads you on to this."

"I tell you no," he replied; "it is hate, deep and bitter, whose direful strength she yet shall feel. But this Norcott, now that he knows his

benefactor, as he used to call me, is the spoiler of his sister's happiness—for she at least loved me—he will be up in arms against me; how to prevent this—if he recovers—Harriet, you are faithful to me; can I trust you now? Yes, yes, I know all that you can say, so do not speak, but let us take this lonely path where we can be completely unmolested.”

The grey dawn was breaking over the cold sky when Fitzroy, pale and haggard, threw himself upon his bed, and courted sleep; but the fickle goddess, who had only on the night of Colonel Werter's death before refused to befriend him, again turned from him in disdain. He tossed and tumbled, shutting his eyes and stretching his limbs without avail, for sleep he could not. A devil was working in his heart, and his brain could not rest. He arose, however, at his accustomed hour in the morning, and breakfasted as if nothing out of the usual course of things had occurred. But scarcely had he pushed his empty cup aside, when he was forced for a second out of his composure by the sudden and unannounced

appearance of John, on whose footsteps followed Earl de Burg.

"You see, sir," began the Earl, apologetically, "that we men of business stand but little on ceremony, which a gentleman so well aware of the value of time as Mr. Fitzroy can readily excuse."

The servant withdrew. Fairfield bowed, and the Earl continued.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting you before on two occasions; the first on the signing of the deed which made you the possessor of an estate in Ireland, once belonging to the former Lady de Burg; the second when I had been prevailed upon by Dr. Ormond to accompany him to this house not long ago. You remember then what passed; nothing of importance, only a convenient loan at high interest. Odd old man that Dr. Ormond. Now, sir, I am here on rather a strange mission."

Again Fitzroy bowed in silence, and the Earl went on.

"It was not until a week ago, that having

occasion to look for a book, which I recollected to have packed in a chest, along with other articles of value, that I came across a dressing-case once possessed by the deceased Lady de Burg, which I never had the curiosity to open until that day; when, much to my surprise, I found among some costly jewels a pocket handkerchief tied round a worthless phial, which had the name of Norcott marked upon the label, while pinned to the handkerchief was this slip of paper, which you will please to peruse."

Fitzroy took the paper, but even as he read, lost not his equanimity; it contained these words—

"I solemnly swear never to lose sight of this Norcott until I drag to light my brother's murderer.

"LETITIA DE BURG."

"And what has this to do with me, my Lord," he asked.

"Simply that you might help me in finding Norcott," replied the Earl, keeping his eyes

steadily on the other's face. "I was in Italy when I first discovered this phial in the jewel case, and knowing that Lady de Burg was not a woman likely to take in wrong impressions, but of sound sense and judgment, I fear that her brother must have been foully dealt with. On my arrival here I went to the establishment directed on the label, but found there that Norcott was ill; they gave me his address, Bell Street, No. —; but he has not been there for days, and the people of the house could give me no further information than that he had quitted the lodgings some evenings previously, as it was thought, to be absent only for the night. But he has not since returned. I went back to the chemists, and they referred me to you as being the only likely person who could assist me in discovering this man, who, if evil has been done, must be implicated in it."

"I regret," said Fitzroy, returning the paper, "that I cannot aid your Lordship, for Norcott, whom I have ever found honest and upright in conduct, has as mysteriously hidden himself from me, and I know not where or how you can trace

him ; neither could I form the least idea of his motive for remaining in secret if he were ill. He ought to have written to account for his non-appearance to the place where he was doing business, or to tell of his whereabouts. However, from the little I know of him, I think him the least likely person in the world to throw light on such a terrible act, or be in any way connected with it, or the family secrets of Lady de Burg."

"Is this establishment his own, or is he in the employ of another, if not his? Why carry it on under his name?"

"Because his master does not wish it otherwise ; but if it pleases your Lordship to learn, I can ascertain the facts of the transaction."

"It is of no consequence, and now I shall say farewell, hoping you will pardon my unwarrantable intrusion. I was so anxious to find this man that all sense of propriety was forgotten."

"Your visit was an honour, my Lord," said Fitzroy, smiling and bowing once more.

Then having accompanied the nobleman to the door, he returned to the breakfast parlour.

De Burg linked his arm in that of a portly

gentleman's, who had kept at a considerable distance from the usurer's house in Grosvenor Square.

"Well," said Dr. Ormond, "of course you did not find out Norcott's address; but what think you now of him?"

"Of him," replied the Earl, "of Fitzroy. My opinion has but little changed since our first acquaintance. I thought him then, as I think him now, the most courteous, fascinating, and the handsomest man I have ever met. There is a language in his very silence, and an attraction in his simplest attitude. But here is the reverse of the medal. I believe now that he is clever enough to cover the villain by gentleness, cunning by simplicity, treachery by frankness, cruelty by kindness, and in fact Fitzroy is the most accomplished scoundrel that I had ever the pleasure of meeting."

A carriage drove past them as the nobleman spoke; the physician raised his hat and paused. The coachman drew in the rein, and soon both gentlemen were standing beside the vehicle, warmly greeting Mrs. Armsby and Miss Augusta.

It was curious to watch the Granny's face at that moment, beaming as it did upon the bald head of Dr. Ormond with as much warmth of expression as it could have done more than a quarter of a century ago, and to see his countenance, as it met her mild blue eye, assume a softer cast than on meeting any other eyes in the world.

For thirty years those two had known each other, for all that time one love had lingered in the heart of each, and yet their lives were parted all those thirty years.

Enquiries were made as to the ladies' health, &c., also for the progress of Mrs. Armsby's heir, who had actually begun to cut his first tooth; then the gentlemen took leave, and the carriage drove on its way. But during the brief interview the sly old lovers had contrived an assignation. No, I beg the Granny's pardon for accusing her of such a youthful indiscretion, for it was the venerable Doctor's fault, who managed, while addressing Mrs. Armsby, to talk at the other lady all the time, saying that he intended dining next day at Beech Grove.

Fitzroy's first act on returning to the parlour

was to write to Mr. Norcott, apprising him of the Earl's visit, and the purport of it. He then summoned John, who began to explain his seeming carelessness in admitting a stranger, as Earl de Burg comparatively was, to his presence without acquainting him of it; but he was cut short by Fitzroy's remarking that it was not the slightest consequence, and a quiet order to have his portmanteau packed before the one o'clock train for Brighton.

Then the servant withdrew, and busied himself about his master's wardrobe, baffled and surprised at finding himself for once overlooked in the luggage, as he had received no intimation of accompanying him, and Mr. Fitzroy was never before known to travel without his valet. Punctual to the instant John saw his master depart; with his blandest smile and most gracious air, he bade John a careless adieu, and promised to be back on the following morning.

Disappointed and angry, the valet, fearing to descend to the servant's apartments lest he should come in contact with the spirited Ellen, mounted the stairs, and shut himself up in an empty garret;

but even here the unhappy swain was not hid from the fair one, for having roamed upstairs and downstairs she came pounding at the door of the unused room, where he remained as mute as a mouse, thinking she would soon get tired of her fruitless knockings, for he knew by the muffled sound that it was her fat arms that bumped against the panel.

But he was mistaken, for she was soon assisted by the harder metal of a poker, which she dashed in fun as it were against the lock, and as love laughs at locksmiths it gave way. Taking the renegade by the collar she drew him to the centre of the floor and shook him violently, until he cried in a conciliatory tone for mercy.

“Why, sweetheart,” he said, “are you angry at my having got master’s leave to stay with you ; such a privation to himself, you know, and what a privilege for me. Besides, he told me this morning that he would present us with twenty pounds to begin our housekeeping with, and that we are to be married when he returns.”

“Lor, did he though, John,” answered the maid, bringing her grip down to a tender squeeze,

from his coat collar to his neck. "How nice, how happy we shall be; twenty pounds—not a bad purse of money to begin with, and he is a good fellow after all. So come and tell Sally, for the kind soul has got ready such a splendid luncheon the moment she found that you were to stay behind. Strange freak of master, surely, for he never did so before; but it matters little, and we shall drink his health all the same."

"Yes, my fairest," sang John. "'Oh! how happy, how merry we shall be, with our children sitting on our knee.' That's what the song says, so you need not blush; but come along and drink Sally's health as well as master's. She will not be long in returning the civility with a brimming bumper to our prosperity. Twenty pounds; won't it make a good beginning in our life. Ha! ha! when he returns."

"But it can't be actually then," remonstrated the bashful maiden; "my trousseau will take some time you know, and he will be here in the morning. No, no, it is too soon, John."

"Too soon," repeated the lover, "when he returns. Ha! ha! never fear that, and we sweet-

hearts for three years and more. Too soon—no, no, my girl; it will be quite time, I assure you. So come along I say again, for I smell Sally's pastry, and I go bail she'll have a quart of wine from master's best bin to whet our appetites withal. Twenty pounds, sweetheart, only think of that!"

"What would Harriet Thompson say? your old flame, John, to hear of our good fortune—but there, don't look so cross."

"Never mind the girl," replied John, testily, "I'll have no more jealousy on that head; Harriet—pshaw! give me that tankard of ale, Ellen; it nerves one's heart for good or evil fortune all the same. Oh! what a treat. Gad, I'm as hungry as a hawk; but why a hawk is always hungry I am sure Natural History does not explain."

So gaily chatting, they gathered round Sally's well stored board, the savoury odour from which was delightfully pleasant to John's olfactory nerves.

We must now turn to a very different scene.

When Mrs. Fairfield, followed by two domestics,

reached Woodbine Cottage and found it in quiet darkness, her suspicions were almost confirmed that some evil had befallen Mrs. Werter. Of this she had scarcely a doubt, for the screams had evidently proceeded from a female voice, and she believed they could have been from her alone. But, as she rang the bell, a light instantly appeared within, and the widow, dressed as she had been on leaving Lilymount, stood at the cottage door, as calmly as if nothing had occurred worthy of note.

Surprised at finding the midnight visitor to be Mrs. Fairfield, and dreading that another change had come over the invalid, she hastened to admit her, with increasing wonder at the scared faces of those who accompanied her.

"I trust your patient is not worse," were the first words that issued from her lips.

"No," replied Ella; "but you, how came you here? Have you been molested? Was it not you who screamed and cried so piteously for help?"

"Me!" returned Mrs. Werter; "no, of course; I have been at home some time; nor have I been

molested in the slightest. And now I remember having heard some distant screams."

Mrs. Fairfield drew her within doors, and gave a hasty explanation.

"I had scarcely returned to Frederick's side, after parting from you, when terrible shrieks came from the lawn; so startling were they, that even my poor brother almost leaped from his bed on hearing them. I, believing on the instant that my—that Edmond Fairfield had devised some means to entrap you, flew to your rescue, but could discover no track of mortal; so we came thither, and thank heaven that you are safe!"

"This is very strange," replied the widow, thoughtfully; "yet, perhaps you are needlessly alarmed—indeed it must be so, since nothing has come of it."

"Yes, it must be so," replied Ella, "heaven grant it may be so; and I am thankful that you have escaped the danger I had apprehended. Now, good night, for I must not delay another moment from Fred."

"Good night," echoed Florence, fastening the gate and returning to the cottage.

Mrs. Fairfield and the servants, believing that the screams, whoever they proceeded from, were of no further moment to them, hastened back to Lilymount.

The lights appeared to have gone out in their absence, for the apartment of the sick man was wrapped in gloom; and fearing that the nurse had fallen asleep, and dreading that the patient might have been anxious for her return, she almost flew up the steps, and found the hall door open, as in their confusion they had left it.

Without stopping even to remark the open door to the servants, Ella noiselessly ascended the stairs and entered the chamber, listening to hear if the invalid slept; but could discover no sound. The night lamp was extinguished, and she failed to discern the slightest object; however, creeping towards the bed, and as no sound issued from the lips of Frederick Norcott, she placed her hand upon his face; it was cold and clammy. Her fingers moved along each feature, until they

reached his throat, where they came in contact with a moist surface. She felt again; there was an open chasm like a gash, and her hand was daubed with a clammy substance.

A groan at this moment quivered from the fireplace; it was where the nurse usually sat, and Ella moved towards it, stretching forth her hand until it rested on another chilly brow.

She did not scream, she had no power to do so; she did not faint, for terror bore her up; but staggering from the room she went slowly downstairs, step by step, and holding tightly by the bannister until she got into the sleeping apartment of the male servant, who had accompanied her to Woodbine. She pushed the door open, and stood before him trembling, ghastly, and smeared with blood, a sight which made even that strong man cry out in horror.

Gasping for breath and clutching a candle, silently and unlike a living thing Mrs. Fairfield again ascended the stairs, tracking as she went the bloody streaks of her own fingers along the bannister. She entered the room, and casting a ray of the dim light round it, her strained vision

rested first upon the bed where Frederick lay like a bleeding corpse with a terrible cut across his throat, and his dishevelled hair clotted in gore; the bed clothes were pulled partially off, and there was evidence of a fierce struggle having taken place.

She next turned towards the mantel-piece, and found the nurse, who was just recovering from a swoon, tied tightly to a chair; her mouth was gagged, and her arms closely pinioned by her side.

Still without speaking Ella motioned to the man who had followed her to loose the woman, and going herself to the bell-pull tore it violently. In a few minutes her maid was beside her, shrieking and clasping her hands over her eyes to shut out what met her view. The girl recoiled from the horrible sight which the unfortunate Norcott presented.

"Hush, wench," cried the man; "rouse yourself, and look to your mistress this dreadful night."

The words had sufficient effect, for the servant, conquering her natural emotion, yet keeping her

eyes carefully averted from the bed asked, "What was to be done?"

"Stay with me," said Mrs. Fairfield, briefly; then writing on a slip of paper—"Lilymount, Come quickly, for God's sake!" she handed it to the man, saying, "You know where Dr. Ormond lives? Yes—you have told me so before. Go! fly for your life; saddle the fleetest horse, and lose not a moment for your soul's sake, until this is in his possession."

While the maid attended to the nurse, Ella again sought the bed of Frederick; was he dead? she examined the gash over which some congealed blood lay, and evidently stopped the hæmorrhage, She lifted the matted hair and looked into his eyes, she held her face to his lips, but could not detect the slightest breath, and still she asked herself the awful question, if he were dead? would it be judicious to tie a bandage over the wound? that she knew would be useless in its present state; would she bathe and remove the gore? no, that she feared would be endangering fresh bleeding; what should she do, she knew not, she only felt that she was powerless to aid

him, whom she would now give her own life to save.

She could do nothing therefore but try to curb her impatience until the arrival of the physician, wailing and wringing her hands in agony, which mode of proceeding grew insupportable as the moments lagged heavily on; an hour elapsed, which she thought ten, and another must pass away before he came; she could not remain thus if she would preserve her reason, she must do something for him, so procuring a bottle of Eau de Cologne, she bathed his brow and hands again and again, for five, ten minutes, for half an hour, for an hour, until at length she starts erect, for something like a breath has issued from his lips, and she stopped her own to listen. Yes, he breathes slowly, faintly; yet he breathes; joy, joy, Frederick Norcott is not dead! And now for the first time since that dreadful shock, Ella gives way, for falling on her knees beside the couch, she covered her head in the bed clothes and wept, as if every sob would burst her heart strings. The maid, who could not yet bring herself to look upon the ghastly sight, lifted her to

a sofa, and tried to soothe her, while the nurse sadly murmured, "Nay, let her weep, poor dear, for it will do her good."

Dr. Ormond, who had long since retired from practice, would have declined leaving his comfortable slumbers, if he had not seen the name of Lilymount attached to the slip of paper, that had been forced upon his servant with urgent entreaties that it should be delivered at once. Any association with the place where he had spent many happy years in the interchange of true friendship, had a claim upon him, and although wondering at the strangeness of the summons, he complied without delay.

Finding that Mr. Norcott's life was not extinct, the physician cautiously began to remove the congealed gore, which being done safely and without a renewal of hæmorrhage, he found the full extent of the injury which had been done, and seeing that the large arteries had escaped, he succeeded in securing several of the minor vessels, then took a seat quietly beside the patient's bed.

The nurse was closely questioned relative to

the mysterious attack upon Norcott's life, but could give no further information than that she had succeeded in quieting her charge, after Mrs. Fairfield, accompanied by her maid and manservant, had gone in search of the person whose screams had so alarmed them all, and that they could not have been many paces from the house, when two men, whose faces she could not distinguish under the black crape they had fastened over them, entered the apartment; one secured and threatened to murder her, while the other, going to the bed, took hold of Mr. Norcott, who struggled longer than, from his reduced strength, she could have expected, and succeeded in partially tearing the covering from the features of his antagonist. This man, evidently afraid of recognition, endeavoured to resume his disguise, and called the other to his assistance, a renewed struggle took place, and the throat of the invalid was cut; then he whose features had been seen staggered from the room, supported by the more hardened villain.

In the meantime Mrs. Fairfield dispatched a hurried note to Florence, preparing her for the

shock she could not fail to receive, at finding Frederick in such a state and in such hands.

She had explained everything to Dr. Ormond, particularly her intimacy with Mrs. Werter, which in itself was sufficient for the generous heart which sympathized with a stranger's sorrow.

The meeting between the widow and the Doctor, though passed in silence, was not the less affecting ; tears streamed down her cheeks, when she found her hand wrung once more by one who had so long been her husband's friend ; above all, he who had so often watched his declining hours ; and the old man, looking on the beautiful form that he had daily been accustomed to see gliding about the darkened chamber of Colonel Werter, sighed heavily at her now saddened and subdued appearance.

Information was given to the authorities of the attempted murder and outrage, &c., &c., at Lilymount ; such news in various places often appears in our morning papers as the deeds of demons from another world, and yet how little they concern us and the general public.

Dr. Ormond was not a little surprised to find in his new patient the Frederick Norcott for whom both he and Earl De Burg had been on the look out for the last four days.

Slowly but steadily he continued to progress, so slowly that Dr. Ormond and the Earl, believing him secured by his own weakness, did not think it necessary to place a safeguard upon him.

There were, perhaps, but few sick persons at that moment in the world whose state was more anxiously watched by so many persons as that of Mr. Norcott. Fitzroy Fairfield read of the attempted murder, and almost devoured the bulletin of the victim's health, which he never failed to receive daily. The Earl longed with impatience to see him well again for his own purpose. Mrs. Werter and Lily as a friend whom they had learned to respect and like, wished him once more convalescent. Ella, as her only shield from sorrow and distress, prayed for his recovery; and Hatty, feeling lonely without him, cried at the tediousness of his illness, because she wanted him to play with and amuse her.

CHAPTER V.

THE GRAPE COVERING.

The Interpreter said, "Look here."

So they looked, and Mercy wondered.

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS.

LADY and Sir Winfred Winlow proposed travelling for at least a year after their brilliant honeymoon. The Baronet, proud of his young wife, lost no opportunity in gratifying her extravagant tastes and exacting wishes ; bidding fair to spoil the proud beauty with his wealth and kindness ; yet Louisa scorned the old man's love, going about from place to place and from scene to scene, scarcely admiring that which must have been fresh and new even to her ; she did not bestow a thought on Woodbine Cottage, or its inhabitants, except to turn in loathing from its poverty, and while its memory lasted to treat her rich husband with a little show of respectful interest.

Much to the bride's chagrin Sir Winfred was obliged to visit Ireland, relative to the disposal of some property, before they started for abroad ; yet once having given vent to her vexation at this arrangement, she bore it calmly, fully believing that all places were alike to her. Having always received kindness from the Dean and Mrs. Netherwell, Lady Winlow lost no time in letting them know of their arrival in Dundrum, a few miles from which her husband's business led him, for she was too ceremonious to call first ; finding that her note remained unanswered, she made enquiries, and found that her old friend was suffering from an attack of fever, from which he was not likely to recover. Grieved as she really was at the tidings, she did not think for a moment of personally enquiring at a house where there was likely to be contagion, and if she felt a consciousness that this selfishness was ungrateful, she might also have spared herself even that, because at the moment Dean Netherwell was sleeping the sleep that knows no waking.

Lady Alcott, who was a far removed cousin of

the Baronet's, called at the residence of the bride, who happened to be out; when, however, the visit was returned, Louisa was welcomed most cordially as a familiar friend of her ladyship's, a reception very different to that which had been accorded to the poor governess of Mrs. Netherwell's little daughter a few months previously.

Mrs. Lindley, kindly and warm-hearted as ever, was delighted to see Louisa, not because she was Lady Winlow, neither so much for friendship towards herself as the remembrance of the respect she bore Mrs. Werter.

This good old family of Irish respectability had failed much during the last twelve months, for like many other aristocrats, Mr. Lindley felt the pressure of the times, and the failure of the crops, as much or more than any of the gentlemen about Dundrum; for being his own agent, and a kind landlord, he could not press the rents from a tenantry, if not hard working, at least as honest and poor as the Irish peasantry almost universally are.

Sir Winfred was sincerely pleased with this fine old man and his ladylike helpmate, for Mrs. Lindley

being affable, although dignified, humble, still proud, winning, soft and lively, yet shrewd, witty and accomplished, presented a fair specimen of an Irish gentlewoman, whom the English Baronet acknowledged to be quite equal to any of his own countrywomen who came within the long range of his acquaintance. But Sir Winfred was struck the most pleasingly by the manners and appearance of William, who had wonderfully improved, if not in a financial view, certainly in every other respect.

"It is quite a pleasure to meet such people as the Lindleys," said Sir Winfred, after one of their long visits. "I hope that splendid fellow, William, will get a chance of making his own fortune. What a head he has. I really am beginning to think that Mrs. Lindley is superior to any English lady I have ever seen, that is with one exception, my love, for your queenly beauty is unsurpassed; still Mrs. Lindley possesses the grace and ease of manner which makes a person feel comfortable in a moment; while the reserve and coldness natural to our native land throws a shade over the same attractions in our ladies."

"Indeed," replied Louisa, "I thought you said my step-mother was the most fascinating woman you had ever met."

"Yea, yes, I forgot Mrs. Werter, who is not only the most fascinating, but the most beautiful creature in the universe, still excepting the incomparable Lady Winlow—but that noble lad, that handsome fellow, William Lindley, should have been born a prince, for he would have graced a throne. O! Louisa," here the baronet paused and sighed. "Dear Louisa, what a joy it would be to us to possess an heir like him."

The lady smiled scornfully in silence.

Returning through Dublin they visited many places *en passant*, and Sir Winfred was much surprised at hearing his bride declare herself so pleased with Ireland, that she intended making a tour through Killarney, for which she proposed they should start on the following morning. This arrangement was hailed with pleasure by her lord, who, wearied with the sight-seeing of all the world beside, had never thought that sweet spot worth the trouble of a few hours' journey; and Killarney, truly called the Garden of Ireland,

with its placid lakes, towering mountains, and hundred charms, well repaid Sir Winfred and his fastidious lady.

In the Gap of Dunloe they listened entranced to the sweet and plaintive echoes of the bugle note until they died away in a melancholy cadence over Magillicuddy's heights ; then to the report of a little cannon, a mere toy, which vibrated above their heads like a terrible artillery.

Even Louisa, unimpassioned as she was, clasped her hands in admiration, and drew in her pony's rein to gaze upon the "Coom a Dhuv," a beautiful valley, cradled between two mountains, which cast a purple shadow over its verdant sward, and enhanced its silent solitude.

The old Weir Bridge and Dinis Island were next commented upon, but here the Baronet, for the first time since his marriage, grew almost irritable, which occurrence was caused by a simple incident, for, waylaid as every visitor is by numerous good-looking girls with pails of goats' milk, of which every lady is supposed to partake, while the gentlemen must "sip a drop of mountain dew," distilled from anything but the pure fount of

nature; unfortunately the maiden who smilingly held the vessel towards Lady Winlow, had taken her companion to be her father, and inadvertently gave utterance to the mistake, which completely upset the bridegroom's equanimity, and made him return the piece of gold which he had intended giving the blue-eyed damsel, for which he substituted a silver coin, vowing all the Kate Kearney's (for each claimed kindred to the old ballad's heroine) the only ill-looking, cross-grained females that he had met in Ireland; when, however, they rowed along the middle lake past Torc mountain, which threw its shadow across the gentle waters, he was himself again, looking and feeling younger than he had done for many years before, from the very freshness and beauty of all that surrounded him.

Landing on Muckcross demesne, they next visited the abbey, which her ladyship declared to be the finest ruin in the world, but at which her bridegroom smiled rather dubiously, while congratulating himself on the pleasure yet in store for her at Rome.

Next day they ascended Mangerton, but Louisa

would go no further than the Punch-bowl, a deep well or lake as clear as crystal when in a glass, although looking black and uninviting in its bed. Laughing at her laziness, Sir Winfred mounted to the top, and was well rewarded for his trouble; at his feet reposed the placid lakes, thickly dotted with tiny islands, covered with their wild hyacinths, yew, and arbutus. Afar the dark mountains stood out in relief from the deep blue sky; the traveller paused entranced at this scene on Mangerton's mighty top, the first grandly beautiful one that he had met with in Killarney, for, lovely as the others were, the wild sublimity now before him rendered the softer graces that he had left behind tame and insipid by comparison.

Sir Winfred, on returning to their hotel, stopped at the village post-office, where he observed a fashionable-looking gentleman asking for letters. Something about the stranger's appearance so attracted the Baronet, that, forgetting the usages of society, he stared long and almost rudely, until the other raised his eyes from the missive he had been perusing, their glances met, and the Baronet turned in some confusion to enquire for his letters.

Scarcely had he mentioned his name when the stranger left abruptly, and the next moment he was standing at the carriage door talking familiarly with Lady Winlow.

"Mr. Fitzroy," he heard her say, "who should have thought of meeting you here?"

Mr. Fitzroy! the Baronet had never heard of him before, and again scrutinized the countenance of the gentleman with a redoubled interest; he pocketed his letters without opening one of them, and joined his wife with a slightly troubled brow. A formal introduction took place, and after a lively conversation, during which Fitzroy mentioned that he was merely on a pleasure excursion in Killarney, each took a laughing adieu, and the Baronet's carriage drove away.

"My dear," gravely remarked Sir Winfred, "If ever there was, or shortly will be, a fit subject for a lunatic asylum, there he goes;—your friend Mr. Fitzroy, if not dangerously mad at present, will be so very soon. Lunacy is in his eyes—those wild, restless orbs braw no good for himself or others."

Lady Winlow smiled at her husband's opinion

of the fascinating and clever individual who had just left them, believing in her heart that one was quite as likely to become insane as the other.

That evening the Baronet and Lady Winlow were rowed across the lower lake to Inisfallen, where they again encountered Mr. Fitzroy, of whose wavering reason Sir Winfred became the more convinced the longer he conversed with him.

On this enchanting island her ladyship's humour changed from sou'-east to nor'-east, as she declared herself weary of the whole place, and that she would start for London on the ensuing day. So the dutiful husband digested his mortifications at this announcement, as he digested his dinner, in obedient silence, and thus Killarney, a casket filled with nature's gems, was thrust aside, not half looked over or appreciated, as many other delightful places were destined to be by the restless, miserable bride of the wealthy Baronet.

Passing through London *en route* for the Continent, Lady Winlow would not visit Mrs. Werter, because she did not wish to bring the Baronet in contact with Woodbine Cottage ; neither would

she write, and so begin a correspondence which she had no intention of continuing. Sir Winfred had often asked the reason of the young step-mother's silence ; but his wife always answered evasively, and so the matter dropped ; yet if her ladyship could not afford to go to the home of her father's widow, she condescended to call at Beechgrove, where she found all as usual with the exception of Julia's death, and the presence of a living heir. Here she heard that Major Somers and his sister had not only paid a long visit on the day previously, but had held a secret conference with Miss Augusta, who, the bride imagined, looked full of unutterable importance.

Beechgrove was their only call, of which neither were sorry, and when they started for Italy on the following morning there was not a throb of regret in Louisa's breast for those she left behind, except for one—for Audley Somers—the sound of whose name she fled from as delicious poison.

The secret conference, jestingly alluded to by Mrs. Armsby, held by the Granny, Miss Somers, and Audley, was of no more importance than generally such secret affairs turn out to be ; in

the first place, it lasted only about ten minutes ; in the second, it was a question of little or no importance to any except the parties concerned ; and lastly it was the giving and receiving of a fourth person's address—Mrs. Werter's—which was transferred to Audley's tablet.

Miss Augusta, poor soul, never suspected that the gay officer had any other than a friendly motive in wishing to visit at the cottage of the widow ; indeed, had she suspected the real feelings of his heart, we fear that the foolish old maiden would have been guilty of a girlish indiscretion by planning some scheme for the lovers' happiness.

It would be impossible to depict the surprise and trepidation of Florence Werter, when in the very midst of her school hours, Lily one day rushed unceremoniously among the scholars and whispered something in her mother's ear, which made her change from red to white alternately. Yet it was only the simple fact that as the little girl went to fasten the garden gate, which some one had left open, her attention was arrested by a lady and gentleman, who were evidently look-

ing for some place, and in whom she discovered Major Somers, and as she supposed, from Louisa's description, his sister.

Lily had scarcely time to finish her explanation and excuse for intruding on forbidden grounds, when the gate bell sent forth a timid sound, which made the widow glance tremulously at a tiny mirror above the mantle-piece and unconsciously smooth her sunny locks, while wondering to herself if she were at all presentable.

Oh! vanity, how it is born and bred with us poor women? Yet we doubt if the visitor were the King of England, or of any other place, or in fact any individual in the world except Audley Somers, that Florence would have wasted a thought on her dress or appearance, a feeling little appreciated by the ungrateful lords of this enlightened generation.

Mrs. Welter heard the summons repeated, yet had not the courage to tell Lily to answer it; but the child's innate politeness prompted her to do so, and almost before her mother could believe that her senses were not in some new and fantastic dream, Audley stood before her—stood in the

very midst of her astonished pupils. She felt her hand clasped in his, and a throb of rapturous joy leap to her heart; she endeavoured to conceal her weakness by affecting composure, and succeeded, for turning to the lady who accompanied him, she bowed with natural frankness, and welcomed her as the sister of a friend already high in her esteem.

Florence smilingly told her visitors that they had startled her little flock, and led the way to another apartment; but Rettie declared that the garden (looking so temptingly through the glass door at the end of the little hall) was irresistible, and proposed adjourning thither, an arrangement gladly acquiesced in by the Werters, because their poverty-stricken parlour would escape unnoticed.

The conversation between the happy trio flowed on freely enough as long as Miss Somers bore the burden of it; but when she insisted upon helping Lily to gather some fruit for their especial benefit, we must acknowledge that the widow had the advantage over the weather-beaten soldier, who was thrown off his equanimity by the glance of an

eye and the smile of a lip, temptingly revealing the rubies and pearls which are more dangerous than the natural gems properly so-called.

"This is a little paradise," he said, breaking a silence of at least a minute.

"Little enough," replied Florence, who, if she were a candid person, would have added, "but never a paradise until you were in it."

This, however, she kept to herself, and Andley continued—

"Those school duties of yours are very arduous; how can you content—"

But here Rettie and Lily returned, and the sentence was left unfinished.

Light and happy as a fairy, the little girl placed a snowy cloth over the green table in the summer house, and in a short time the latest fruit and flowers of the season were laid upon it. The visitors thought the cheap hospitality of that cottage garden was a hundred times more acceptable than the costly luxury of a princely palace.

"Mother," said Lily, after the Major and Miss Somers had departed, and the children were dismissed from their tasks; "Mother, what brought

"I shall sweep the room," said the pupil, answering that wistful glance, and making good her words, for all was in readiness before the rest of the children made their appearance.

The happy flock of merry hearts that gathered now about her, helped to restore Lily to herself, who tried to talk and amuse them as best she could, until their romping and laughing became so uproarious that her eye wandered to the clock, in astonishment at her mother's tardiness. She found that an hour and a half had elapsed since the usual time for the beginning of the daily lessons.

Mrs. Werter, on leaving the cottage, had gone to Lilymount without lingering on the way, but as she neared the house she was met by a servant, whose agitation warned her that all was not right within. It was Ella's own maid, and whose sobs so impeded her utterance that the widow could glean nothing more from her than an unaccountable regret for something that she could not understand. Passing the girl, she ran upstairs, and found, to her terror, Mrs. Fairfield's chamber all topsy turvy and vacant. She next tapped at

Mr. Norcott's door, but finding all within was silent, she entered, and discovered it also to be deserted. She turned for an explanation to the maid, who had followed; however, before she had time to speak, she was interrupted by the butler, who came forward in evident anger.

"They are both gone, madam," he said stiffly; "we know not where or how, but you, madam, shall give some account to honest folk. This much I can but tell you, that when the breakfast bell rang this morning, Mrs. Fairfield, who was always ready at every summons for her brother's comfort—for she would not let a human being, but herself meddle with a bit he eat or a sup he drank—so, as I was saying, when the breakfast bell rang over and over again without an answer Mary here repaired to her mistress's room, just as you did now, madam, and found it as you saw it yourself, and neither master nor mistress could be discovered in any place. You will please to tell us where they are gone to."

"No," replied Mrs. Werter, "of that I am as ignorant as yourself, and I think their disap-

pearance most unaccountable. Can you explain nothing further? Did they receive any visitor after I left last evening?"

The man thrust the girl aside, whose tongue had now evidently regained its natural functions, but as she advanced to reply, the butler, entirely disregarding the maiden's wishes, begged of Mrs. Werter to follow him to the breakfast parlour, where he would tell her all he knew about the matter.

She did so, and when they gained the room he stood aside to allow her to enter first, which she had scarcely done, when, to her amazement and mortification, she found that the man had invited her there for the purpose of entrapping her, and that the door was locked on the other side the instant he withdrew.

Thus for the space of an hour she continued a prisoner, despite her demands for egress, and her indignant reproaches at the uncalled-for outrage. Finding that her efforts for freedom were unavailing, and horrified with the idea of perhaps being captured by her unscrupulous enemy, she paced

the room in fury, chafing herself into the belief that it could be no other than a scheme of Fitzroy's to secure her there.

"But," she reasoned, pausing suddenly in her walk, "but would Ella lend herself to this deep villany, and betray a helpless woman under her own roof? For it could not have been done without her sanction. No, she could not do so, for she is his wife. Yet, alas! if she be not actually lawfully wedded, I may be the victim of both; may suffer thus for my credulity. Yet that candid brow of hers; surely truth is set upon its placid surface; and the gray locks upon that young head bespeak too much sorrow to be felt by any other than a faithful heart. No; ah! no; whatever be my fate, Ella Fairfield is guiltless of act or part in it. Hark! a footstep approaches. Now, may heaven help me if I be powerless to help myself."

At this moment a whisper hissed through the keyhole, near the door of which she stood, in anxious contemplation of its massive workmanship.

"Well, madam," said the voice, which she

recognised to be that of the man servant, "is your mind now collected enough to answer the questions of the police authorities, who will be here presently, unless you tell us at once where you have helped the master and mistress to fly to, without paying our wages and, for aught we know to the contrary, leaving the place over head and ears in debt. They did not deserve the services of honest folk like us, who could have paid ourselves a hundred times over out of the plate chest that is lying open up stairs if we were like other people; but conscience, madam, is the poor man's best but hardest friend, and often speaks when we do not wish to hear it."

"Yes, that is true, indeed, madam," chorused the girl outside; "and there are mistress's beautiful silk dresses, that I might have taken if I wished, but I wouldn't."

"Open the door and I will satisfy you both," said Florence, relieved on finding the horrible vision she had conjured up evaporate before the breath of the suspicious menials.

The door was unlocked, and she was liberated from her temporary imprisonment. She perceived

that the people, interested only for themselves, had mistaken her for an accomplice in the mysterious flight of their employers, and detained in order to intimidate her into paying their demands.

“Let us search,” she urged, “more diligently for the clue of this affair, of which, on my honour as a gentlewoman, I know nothing further than what yourselves have told me.”

Florence led the way again to Mrs. Fairfield’s chamber, and gazing round the tossed apartment, found a slip of paper lying carelessly on the carpet. To take it up and read it was the work of a moment, but it was only a bill of butcher’s meat, groceries, and bakery; disappointed, she cast it from her, then going to the mantel-piece, an exclamation escaped her, for lying on its slab was a packet addressed to herself; she tore it open, and a roll of bank notes met her expectant view; having unfolded each one, in the centre of the last she found the following lines:—

“Dearest and best of friends,—

"I leave you for ever. I go to save the lives of those who are infinitely more precious to me than my own. You did not understand Frederick last evening when he spoke of that sad little word 'farewell,' nor did I until now, now that my brain is stung to madness. Oh! may heaven save your heart from the agony that is rending mine. And—but I dare not trust myself to dwell upon this subject, or my fortitude must fail me. The money you will find here is to pay the servants, who are honest, and will faithfully deliver up the house and its contents to Mr. Fairfield. I enclose more money than that which is due, the remainder please to give to the poor woman, my old pensioner, who lives in the lane where we called not long since; poor creature, she will miss me sadly. Now I must say good-bye, and beg that you will not think me ungrateful for leaving you without one embrace, but I could not trust myself with that, and I dare not tarry even if I would; for every moment is worth more than gold. Farewell, my dearest friend, I go out once more into the cold, hard world, where your image or that of Lily's

shall never be forgotten. And, oh! do not entirely erase from your heart the memory of the faithful but unfortunate,

“ELEANOR FAIRFIELD.

“2 o'clock, a.m.”

Shocked and grieved at being deprived of her who had ever been so kind, Florence did as the note requested, and having satisfied the demands of the domestics, bore with their apologies until she was wearied with their importunity. She next packed and placed together such articles of clothing as belonged to Ella, and having written her name on a card, which she stitched firmly on the outside of the bundle, she stowed it away in an empty wardrobe. Then arranging every chair and table in their accustomed places, feeling that she would never again be within the walls of Lilymount, she took a general survey of the well-known room, as if to impress its last appearance upon her memory, and left the house.

The day was far advanced, when having discharged all claims on Mrs. Fairfield, the widow returned to her school duties, sorrowful at losing

Ella, perplexed at the secrecy of her flight, and wearied with the whole morning's business. As she reached the garden gate she was hailed by the boisterous laughter of the merry children, who, of course had taken advantage of her absence and the unexpected holiday to give free scope to the exuberance of their spirits; not noticing Lily's sunken eyes and unusually pallid countenance, Florence reproached her for the uproar, over which, had she paused to consider, she must have known that the little girl had no control; but harassed and out of sorts, the mother had spoken the angry words, and the child went her way with a sense of injustice at her heart, and tears of mortification streaming down her young cheeks.

Mrs. Werter felt that to begin the monotonous lessons after so much excitement was utterly impossible, so dismissing her pupils with an apology to their parents, she endeavoured to read, which occupation proving equally impossible, the book was thrown aside for some light fancy work, but she found herself cross-stitching a delicate rose leaf with black house-wife thread; she put aside the basket of Berlin wool also, as she did so

a shadow darkened the window, and there, standing amid the withered flowers in the garden, she saw Audley Somers looking full upon her.

Although the Major was anything but an unfrequent visitor of late, Florence started at his sudden appearance, their eyes met, his with a wistful glance of enquiry, and hers with a delighted though frightened expression, that must have conveyed the burden of an invitation to enter the cottage, for he was by her side before she could still the wild throbbings of her heart, or hide the vivid crimson that mounted to her cheeks at an apparition so unexpected at that hour.

"I see something has gone wrong with you," he said. "I marked it in your face when you put away that book, 'My Novel,' by Bulwer, which if anything book shape could rivet attention it would not have failed to have done so."

"He takes the trouble to study my countenance," she thought, "it is very kind, but then he would do the same to Lily."

"I have lost a valued friend," replied Florence. "Mrs. Fairfield, of whom you have heard me speak, has left Lilymount."

"Would that another—friendship could supply her place, or rather a higher one in your heart," he remarked, while twisting to its utter destruction a skein of sky blue wool that had fallen out of the basket; Florence picked up another that was on the floor, and both looked very silly, until the young man went towards a bunch of withered cowslips that were preserved under a glass shade on a little side table.

"This is Lily's work," he said. "She is a rare child, is Lily."

The mother's conscience smote her for the unjust reproach she had given the little girl a few moments before, and going towards the door she replied, "Yes, she is a good little thing indeed, I shall call her thither, she will be so glad to see you."

Audley turned hastily and caught her hand as it rested on the handle.

"Not yet," he answered, in an agitated tone, "we are so seldom alone together. I have so much to say—to explain—Florence, you cannot but know—you cannot but have felt how sincerely I love you. Yet situated as I now am, I do wrong

to tell you so. I love you, yet I dare not ask you to be my wife. I love you, and we are separated by a wider space than land or ocean could devise. Ah! Florence, I would not have told you this if I could help it, but this silent worship was preying so heavily upon my heart, that I listened only to my own selfish passion, which prompted me to come here to-day and tell you everything."

His voice faltered, and he looked into her face; it was glowing with a new light, it was radiant with the unspeakable bliss of feeling herself beloved by him, who alone of all others, she would be so.

"You are not angry," he continued, "Florence, you are not angry. Speak even one word to tell me that you forgive my selfish and exacting conduct."

"Not that, not that," she murmured, "I can but feel—what your lips have uttered."

She stopped, and there was a short but rapturous silence, during which her head bent until it rested on his shoulder.

"You love me, Florence, do you love me?"—he gasped out the question, and waited breath-

lessly for a reply, but it came not, for in that mute act of confidence he was already answered.

Yes, she loved him, or she had not been thus, neither would she have listened to every word that fell from his lips as though each tone had sounded in her heart with a strange and delightful music. Yes, she loved him, and, alas! he was bound by every tie of honour to another; he told her all—he explained the compact that had been entered into relative to engagements, settlements, &c., between the Hon. Jane Alcott's father and his own—it was a bitter trial, an ordeal in which the woman proved the stronger, for when Audley Somers left that humble cottage it was with a hopeless sorrow in his soul, because he feared he might have taken a final leave of her he loved so truly.

Audley went away from Florence determined never to bring a grief upon his father's grey head by any dishonourable conduct of his own—he was gone to keep his promise to his plighted bride, while Florence set about her household cares with a bright joy thrilling in her heart; he loved her, and it was enough of happiness to illumine the

present with a dazzling radiance, more she thought not of.

When Lily heard what had taken place at Lily-mount, her regret for Mrs. Fairfield knew no bounds. Ella had been one of the few from whom she had experienced real kindness, even tender affection, which was returned a hundred-fold by the child, because to it was added the lively gratitude of a warm nature.

Lily loved her mother almost as a faithful dog could be said to love his master, humbly yet steadfastly watching every movement of the dear form, that she might anticipate her wishes, and ready to answer every chance look of affection; but she thought of Mrs. Fairfield when her head pressed the pillow at night, and when she rose from it at early dawn. Ella was her dream, her pleasure and her comfort, yet she loved her humbly, likewise receiving the words of endearment that fell from her lips, as a parched flower receives the dew of heaven.

This tenderness for one who was to her comparatively a stranger, was, perhaps, a very wrong feeling for the little girl to cherish; yet it was

natural, the tie of blood has little or no sympathy with the human heart, for it is habit and association that mostly rivet the links of kindred and affection.

Often as Lily watched Mrs. Fairfield caress and fondle Hatty, she felt a pang of sorrow in her breast because she could not remember when she had been thus fondled and caressed by her own mother, for Florence seldom showed much outward tenderness to any of her children, least of all to Lily. Yet a mother's love was strong within her, despite the careless exterior, and the short-tempered caprices that each day of petty cares and annoyances began to call forth, and which Lily bore from her with the patient and uncomplaining devotion of a loving heart.

CHAPTER VII.

LEAVING THE COTTAGE.

"There are messengers
That feelingly persuade me what I am."

SHAKESPEARE.

THE pertinacity with which Earl de Burg clung to his suspicion of Frederick Norcott's guilt worked at last upon Dr. Ormond. Yet the compassion he felt for the grey-headed young sister, who hovered so gently about the sick man's couch, suggested the hope that death would arrest any advance of human justice, and by summoning the suffering Frederick to a mightier bar, save Eleanor Fairfield from a deeper sorrow.

"If," he thought to himself; "if Colonel Werter has been foully dealt with, what interest could this Norcott have had in it? True there is a mysterious connexion between him and Fitzroy;

but after all it is only a business one, and to Fitzroy—may heaven forgive me for it—I bear a stubborn antipathy, which will not be got rid of; but if the devil be not as black as he is painted, even the usurer may have his good points. And if young Norcott has had the benefit of their sunnyside, what has it to do with Colonel Werter's death? Bah! the Earl's a humbug to think this fine looking fellow could be a murderer. Bah! the word could never sound in unison with a noble face like his. Murderer! no; the name cannot be saddled upon his shoulders, and Colonel Werter died as natural a death as any man need wish to die; hard living shortens life, and who could expect to keep up at the pace that he was running? Yes, the Earl is a fool."

When, however, Dr. Ormond next visited Lilymount, and heard of the sudden flight of its inmates, it must be confessed that if he believed in Mr. Norcott's innocence he felt wonderfully relieved at his disappearance.

Although professing to treat with scorn the charge of the crime with which his patient was accused, he knew that Earl de Burg would not be

so easily shaken in his purpose of coming at the truth of the affair; and sympathising with grief, of which he knew so little, he was glad of the escape of the sorrow-stricken penitent, whose faithful attendant at a couch where good nursing prevails over medical skill, he had not only admired, but respected.

Still the Doctor sometimes felt a qualm of conscience at having in thought, at least, connived at the escape of a suspected, if not a guilty person, from the just laws of his beloved country. Yet these were circumstances over which he had no control.

When Earl de Burg was informed that the man whose weakness he and Doctor Ormond had looked upon as their greatest safeguard was actually missing, his rage knew no bounds; he fumed, stamped, and voted the physician an ignoramus. Then taking the matter more completely into his own hands vowed that before night his solicitor should be made acquainted with the whole transaction.

During the first month after Mrs. Fairfield's departure from Lilymount Mrs. Werter noticed a

gradual decrease of her scholars, which were now diminished to the small number of six; and determined by calling upon their parents to regain if possible those she had lost.

She was going out one morning with this intent, when she was attracted by the sound of a loud ring at the garden bell, and looking from the window she perceived Lily receiving letters from the post-boy.

At all times, and to almost every person, a letter is an occurrence; but to Florence it was an event, and thinking that at last Louisa had written, she took them hastily from the child, but found to her disappointment one to be from Ireland, in the school-boy hand of Charlie, and the other that of a stranger's. Charlie's, of course, was the first to be perused, and tears streamed copiously down her cheeks as she did so.

"What is the matter now, mother dear?"

Lily had asked the question over and over again; but received no answer until the missive had been read a third time, when impatiently breaking the seal of the other Florence said—

"Charlie writes to say that Bamber has taken

scarlatina, and that the master insists upon having him immediately removed, because he fears contagion to the rest of the boarders; but here is a postscript," she added, speaking more to herself than to the anxious listener. "Dean Netherwell is—good heaven! what is this? Dean Netherwell is dead. Our one good friend is no more; what now is to become of the boys?"

"No more," echoed the unselfish girl; "that dear, kind gentleman. Poor Mrs. Netherwell and Lucy, how they will grieve at such a loss. But our darling Bamber, mother; if you could spare me I would go to Ireland, and nurse him night and day. You might trust me, for I would feel no fatigue, and the 'Sea Captain' would bring me safely over the beautiful ocean."

Lily stopped short, and flew to her mother, who had fallen rather than sank on one of the schoolroom forms, with the pallor of death upon her face, and the second letter lying open upon her lap. The terrified cry that burst from the child's lips had the effect of recalling her; she looked up, and instinctively screened the missive with her hand.

"Yes," she faltered, "some one must go to the boy, and that without delay."

All the woman's cares and disappointments were forgotten in the anxiety of a mother for her suffering offspring, and the unlucky letter that had caused her so much mortification and indignant scorn was thrust between the bars of the kitchen grate to consume in its own falsehood.

Could the pure eyes of Lily have rested on the rather intricate characters of a disguised writing, she would have gained their meaning in almost such another epistle as Dean Netherwell had received when Louisa was the instructress of his daughter Lucy; a vile calumny on a virtuous woman, for it was an anonymous advice from a "disinterested friend" to one of the parents of Mrs. Werter's pupils, begging the lady to withdraw her children from the pernicious influence of the justly disinherited wife of Colonel Werter, who, for causes best known to herself, had passed in a schoolmistress's guise under the name of Lee. The lady who enclosed this anonymous letter, which had been written to herself, assured Florence that almost every family in the neigh-

bourhood had received a similar communication.

Little doubting that this was the work of Fitzroy, Mrs. Werter at any other time would have made an effort to assert her rights as an honest woman, not only by giving all the explanation requisite regarding her assumed name, and openly avowing the persecution of her enemy, but by claiming the protection of the police authorities. But now, with Charlie's entreaties lying before her to hasten to his sick brother, she could not move in the matter.

To think with Mrs. Werter was to act, and her first thought was how to dispose of the furniture of the cottage, for now that her friends had deserted her, now that Fitzroy was again on her track, she determined never again to enter it. She knew that by setting it up for auction would cause delay, so her only resource was to find a broker who would purchase at its value.

Dismissing in their turn each of the few pupils who began to assemble with a short note informing their parents of her son's illness, the widow hastened to the metropolis, and returned with a

man, who, setting a price on every article in the house, soon had all in his possession for a sum not exceeding the half of what had been expended in purchasing them.

She then went to the landlord, who, as the rent had been paid on the day before, civilly took up the cottage and forgave her a night's lodging, impressing his generosity upon her mind by the frequent assurance that it was customary for a landlord to receive a quarter's notice; however, the accommodating gentleman, after expressing his regret at losing a punctual tenant, bade a friendly adieu, and she returned to the empty house to prepare herself and Lily for the journey.

It did not take long for Florence and Lily to pack their few articles of clothing, or to find themselves lodged for the night in a small hotel almost in the heart of London, where the widow, after locking her chamber because she felt afraid and uncomfortable in the strange place, could not help wondering at the rapid changes which had taken place in their destiny during the space of one short day.

Charlie's letter, the school broken up, the furniture sold, and they now so far on their way to Ireland, perhaps to look upon the corpse of a beloved child; but despite the noise and bustle of a London inn, Lily slept soundly, and rose with the morning's dawn refreshed and strengthened. Mrs. Werter also felt better able to pursue the duty foremost in her mind, so having paid for their frugal breakfasts they were with all possible speed on their way to take their berths in the first vessel bound for Ireland. In this at least fortune favoured them, for in an hour more the steamer would have left the quay.

All was confusion on board, and they were glad to take refuge in the quiet cabin, impatiently to wait the ringing of the bell for starting.

Their passage was swift, and Mrs. Werter breathed a prayer of thankfulness when the first glimpse of Irish soil met her longing vision, for every moment that parted her from her child was fraught with a thousand terrors to the faithful heart of the fond mother.

Landing near the Custom House in Dublin, they procured a cab, and trusting implicitly to

the driver, who promised to bring them to a cheap lodging house, they passed many turns and windings until they stopped at a freshly painted and respectable dwelling in Gloucester place ; the door was opened by a smart girl with showy ribbons in her cap, who, having ushered the strangers into an unpretending, but neat parlour, went to acquaint her mistress of their presence.

The lady of the house as she entered, instinctively returned Mrs. Werter's salutation with a curtsy, and hearing that she wanted a lodging asked her to look at her first floor, but the widow briefly stated her circumstances, and explained frankly that the cheapest in her house would be almost exceeding her means of payment.

"Indeed," replied the landlady, her eye glancing over the veiled figure before her, then to the wistful features of the child ; "the cheapest are the top back and front apartment, the rent of which is 15s. 6d. per week, and which you can see if it be your pleasure."

Mrs. Werter bowed in silence, and they ascended the clean but uncarpeted staircase, until they

reached the apartments specified ; they were spacious for the appearance of the house, and although poorly furnished, affected elegance in the few ornaments they contained, displaying taste in the decoration of the chintz window curtains and chair covers ; on the back of every alternate one was arranged an antimacassar of coarse crochet cotton, so managed as to give an air of fashion to their stiff mahogany rails ; by the mantle piece was an ancient settee, also covered with the same neat pattern, over which was thrown some faded embroidery ; the carpet, although robbed of the brilliancy of its youthful grandeur, was yet good and well kept, with its clean saving covers at each window, and under the round table, which stood primly in the centre of the room, and modestly covered with a cloth of consumptive looking blue damask ; leaning stiffly against the wall, behind the door, was a large sofa, which, letting down its back, answered the double purpose of a lounge in the day time and a bedstead at night.

The sleeping apartment, which looked over the tops of smaller houses in the rear, was

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woman could reply, the sagacious "jarvey," in hand, with a trunk slung across his shoulder, stood beside her.

"You are forgetting the reference," said the landlady, bowing to the sable figure which she imagined was resisting every effort she made to distinguish her features.

"Reference," repeated Florence, now raising her crape veil and revealing a young and lovely countenance to the scrutinizing gaze that had been so often bent upon it.

"You surely must know, that I could not let my lodgings without giving and receiving references."

"True, true; I forgot that. Yet I could get enough and to spare, if I had the time, but I came a long journey, hurried from home by the tidings that one of my children was sick, dying now perhaps, and I thought of nothing else. Oh! madam, if you are a parent, have compassion, and give me leave to bring my darling here at once, that I may nurse him with a mother's care."

"Oh! do; pray do; and heaven will bless

you," chimed in the plaintive voice of the little girl; the woman turned, and drawing Lily near her, kissed her white forehead, and signing to the man to let down his burthen, would have dismissed him with money out of her own purse, but Mrs. Werter said hastily—

"Thanks, thanks, good stranger; but I owe this man a debt of gratitude which only I can pay. I am not done with him yet, however, for I must go to my child this moment, if I have your permission to bring him thither."

The lady looked confused for a moment, then boldly meeting the other's eye, said frankly—

"I have lodgers in the house, by which I gain my maintenance, were they to know of a contagious sickness being here, they would of course instantly leave."

"Too true," replied Florence, now bursting into tears, which proved her most persuasive argument.

"But," continued the woman, "I will do my best for you, and if they do come to know it and leave, why heaven, which has so often assisted

me before, will not desert me then, so in God's name, bring your child here and no more about it."

Telling Lily to kindle a fire and procure some refreshments before her return, Mrs. Werter hurried away without another word.

Taking off her hat and cloak, the little girl asked the landlady where she should get some fuel and provision.

"The servant shall do that for you to day, dear; as you are tired," said the woman, bustling to the top of the stairs, and calling over the bannisters, 'gave her directions to the maid in a tone that almost apologized for the trouble.

"What glorious hair you have," she remarked, on returning to the sitting room, then fondling the locks she admired, asked, "what is your name, and who is your mother? Ah! you both look as if you were little accustomed to mix with the rough part of the world."

"My name," replied the child, "is Lily. My mother is the widow of Colonel Werter, of Lily-mount, near London; but he is dead and we are here, madam."

"A Colonel to leave his family so badly off," was the next remark of the mistress, as she helped the maid of all work to kindle a fire, and make the room look more cheerful. "Well, when such things occur in real life, I am sure there is no need to go to novel reading for them. And my name, dear, is Raymond; Miss Raymond, for I never married, although I might have done so often. I had plenty of opportunities."

"I am sure you had, madam," answered the child, lifting her eyes to the good-natured face before her; "but now please, will you tell me where I can purchase some tea and bread?"

"If miss wishes," broke in the servant, "I will get her whatever she requires."

The offer was gratefully accepted, and long before the time had expired that could convey Mrs. Wexter to Rathmines and back again, the lumps of coal and turf were mingling together in one red mass, shedding a warm glow on the white and gold china that was arranged so primly on Miss Raymond's best tea tray, and on the homely provisions there provided. The day was cold, and the gas that puffed and

bugled between the bars of the brightly polished grate gave a comfortable appearance to the apartment; still the anxious child crouched upon the hearth rug with chill shiverings pervading her frame, despite the ruddy blaze that danced so merrily on the faded carpet.

"Why do you tremble so?" asked the landlady, "you surely cannot be cold now, and everything looking so nice and cosy."

Lily made no reply, but rising hastily went to the window, and tried to get a glimpse of the blue sky between the closely-built houses, repeating to herself, "Oh! will they ever come, will they ever come?"

At last the sound of wheels fell upon her listening ear, and, holding her breath to detect in what direction they were moving, she tracked their sound until they turned down the street. Recognising the carman, she flew down stairs to receive the expected forms of her mother and Bamber, but before she could open the door a strong young footstep fell upon the pavement, not the lubberly one of the man, but a fresh

springing footstep which she imagined to be Charlie's. She drew back the lock, but instead of a brotherly greeting, she was caught in the warmer embrace of William Lindley.

"Fear nothing," he whispered, smiling at her astonishment, "I have been with him, and your brother is safe."

Until that moment Lily had forgotten that her brothers were located in the same school with young Lindley; had she remembered it before she would have been satisfied of his receiving kind attention, so great was her faith in her youthful friend.

"Bamber, dear Bamber," she murmured, disengaging herself from the boy gentleman, and turning to the emaciated little figure that had been tenderly lifted from the cab by the driver.

Mrs. Werter followed her son in silence, and saw him laid comfortably in bed, then, addressing the man, she said, "I scarcely know how to repay your consideration and faithfulness."

"Repay, ma'am," replied the jarvey, in a broad Irish accent, "give me my fare, ma'am, which

means, pay without the Re. But foreigners use queer words sometimes, and often puzzles us, as we do them with our blarney."

"You have been very civil and obliging," remarked the widow, giving him more money than his scrupulous mind would, at first, allow him to take.

"Please take it," she urged, "and remember that a kind word is often the key to a honest heart;" but seeing the man staring vaguely at her, she added, "take the coins, for they scarcely compensate you for the services you have rendered."

"Bess, darling," said the man, rattling the silver in his palm, and addressing his jaded animal, "only think of three half crowns; faith, we are crowned in earnest this day; who knows but that luck is turning the warm side of her shoulder to us at last. Go it, Bess, my dear."

Miss Raymond was a good sort of woman in her way, and although blunt in her kindness, was not altogether wanting in refinement, which, however, she managed to hide under the cloak of abrupt good nature. She had no ties except

that which bound her, with deep and devoted affection, to an only sister, who, almost living on the bounty of Miss Raymond, filled a sort of honorary post as caretaker of some empty houses, for which she was allowed the large sum of two shillings per week.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATE OF A WEDDING GIFT.

"There's a tear in the eye of yon beautiful girl,
As she parts with a trinket of ruby and pearl."

POEM OF THE PAWNBROKER.

"He will soon get over it," said William Lindley cheerfully, as they returned to the sick boy's couch, after partaking of a slight repast.

"Yes, I feel well already," returned Bamber, "and I am so glad; oh! so very glad now."

"Glad of what, love?" asked Mrs. Werter, arranging the pillows under the hot head, "that you are better?"

"No, but to be here; it is so pleasant to look upon you, to feel you about me, instead of that grim old dame the schoolmaster's mother, with her stiff silk dress that rattled and rumbled until it made my temples throb so, and then she was so cross. She wanted Charley not to write to

you, and told her son that there was no fear of contagion, for that I was only home-sick—home-sick, that was all; but from the moment she heard of Dean Netherwell's death she thought she would never get me away fast enough, thanking her stars, most likely, that they had been regularly paid so far. Give me a drink, mamma. Oh! I am very glad to be with you again."

"Hush, dear, you must not speak so much, but rest quiet, for you are greatly excited, which is bad."

"I feel so strong," said Bamber, laughing and pushing back the thick curls from his moist forehead; "what if I were only foxing after all? Ask Lindley what he thinks about it, for day or night he did not leave me. Ah! yes, I was sick, and he knows it, who watched me better than brother Charley; good old fellow is Willy."

The boy flung his arms about excitedly as he spoke, and tossed his head from side to side on the pillows, until Florence feared it had been the risking of his life to have had him removed at such a time; his bright glowing eyes and flushed cheeks alarmed her more than she had hitherto

been, and sending for the nearest physician, she dismissed Lily and William from the chamber.

The medical man soon arrived; and having condemned the circumstance of the child's removal, ordered him to be kept quiet, as the disease was at its height, and the crisis would soon be passed for good or ill.

Lily and Willy were anxiously waiting in the sitting room for the doctor's verdict, and as his footsteps descended the stairs both were by the sick bed to learn the gist of his opinion. It was useless for the widow to urge the necessity of their absence, or to beg either of them to leave her, for they were determined to bear their share of the burden, and that night was passed by the boy and girl at the side of Bamber. Florence, overcome with fatigue, lay upon the sofa in the adjoining apartment, but sleep she could not.

"And these must be cut away," remarked Lily sorrowfully, touching the beautiful curls of the sick boy.

"That will matter little," answered William, "for Bamber will neither care for or miss them; but you, Lily, must not enter this room to-

tomorrow, for if you get ill this would be cut off too."

"And that would matter little, also," said Lily, shaking back her own ringlets, which he had gathered in a shining mass, while poising in his hand.

The boy drew closer to her and said gravely, "Child, child, there is a world of wealth in that little head of yours, and every hair upon it is more precious to me than a thread of gold."

"Then," she returned saucily, "if ever I want my purse filled with current coin I have only to change my hair for it; but see how quietly he sleeps, dear brother; I trust mother, who is so anxious and weary, can sleep as well."

But Florence did not sleep; she had lain down more to pacify their affectionate entreaties than to rest, and when the morning's light broke through the slits of the half open shutters, she stood beside Bamber paler and less refreshed than when she had left him.

In the course of the day Lily saw the sick boy's brown curls twist and cling to the barber's scissors as if loath to leave the head they decorated, but

regret for the curls was forgotten in the pleasure of seeing the little patient recovering quickly and growing stronger every day, until he was able to sit up by the fire, listening to the stories his mother read, or that Lily framed for his amusement.

William Lindley remained two days to watch beside his young schoolfellow, and returned well satisfied, when all danger was passed away, to resume his studies with redoubled zest.

The school fee for Charley and Bamber had been regularly paid by Dean Netherwell, but since his death a letter had been received by the proprietor, informing him that the stinted circumstances of the clergyman's widow henceforth prevented her defraying it. Accordingly, Charley was sent home, and Mrs. Werter, for the first time since she left Woodbine Cottage, began to consider how next she should employ herself for the support of her children.

They had been in their lodgings about a month, and the landlady proved a kind and agreeable person, punctual in all things, and particularly so respecting her rent.

A few days after Charley's dismissal from the school, Florence entered the sitting apartment of Miss Raymond to ask her assistance in procuring a few visiting tuitions ; but this the lady assured her would be out of the question, as the highest references were required ; also, that she knew of no family where there was a single child.

Mrs. Werter next proposed that she should assist in obtaining plain work, and to this she cheerfully assented ; but after waiting a week the widow was beginning to think that her landlady had forgotten all about her. When that august personage entered the room with a large bundle in her arms, she was heated evidently from fast walking, and she threw the parcel upon the table with some asperity.

"There," she said, "that will keep your fingers nimble for a time. Shirts, two shillings each ; four rows of stitching on breasts, ditto wrists, ditto shoulder pieces ; they are for a private gentleman who lives in Drumcondra, and must be finished in a week."

"You are very kind," replied Mrs. Werter, "have you carried this large parcel all that

distance yourself? I am sure it is very far, and I know not how to thank you."

"What of it," said Miss Raymond, wiping her flushed face. "I like walking, or I should not have done it. How is your son to-day, ma'am?"

Bamber looked up at the strange inquisitor, and answered for himself, at which she took a packet of sweets from her pocket, and put them slyly into his hand.

Thus, through the kindness of her eccentric landlady, Florence worked on from day to day, and from night to night, assisted as before by Lily; but they were often obliged to be idle for weeks together when work of any kind was not available, and at such times the widow, lamenting the rapidly decreasing bulk of her purse, still hoped that the next day would bring relief.

At last, after a longer spell of idleness than usual, she looked upon the purse in despair—for it was empty.

A silver tea-caddy, which had been one of her wedding presents, stared at her from a side table behind the door.

"It must be parted with," she said, laying a stress upon the word *must*. "Bamber must have broth, and to make it there must be meat ; therefore, Lily, this must be parted with."

"But how, mother?" asked the child. "Who would buy it?"

"Buy it! I never meant to sell it. No, no—for the hour may be when it can come again into my possession. Come hither, Lily, and look from this window, to the left on the opposite side of the street ; do you see three large brass balls? They are a sign that people can pledge things there—leave whatever it may be for a month, a year, or whatever time is convenient, and get money for it. Take the tea-caddy, it is silver, and they will give you a pound or more. Get a duplicate ticket, which is to release it when we can afford to do so. Why do you stare at me so? Go at once and do as I have told you."

She had spoken rapidly, and as though each word were choking her.

"Oh! I cannot ; I dare not! I would be afraid!" cried Lily, shrinking from the window.

"Of what! Shall I go myself, or let the weak boy in the other room perish for want of nourishment?"

"No, dearest mother; give me the caddy, and tell me what to do again," said Lily, tying on her hat tightly, and trembling visibly—for there was a look of desperation in her mother's eyes, and a hard, cold tone in her voice that puzzled her.

"Do as you see others do."

Florence muttered the last sentence with impatient bitterness, and the child looked into her face with redoubled terror.

"Forgive me, darling," she said, "I am very cross; but, oh! Lily, I am very wretched."

The little girl spoke not, but took the caddy and hurried from the room, hiding it under her cloak, and setting her teeth hard to keep back the sob that struggled to her lips.

"What shall I do?" she murmured, stopping at the pawn office and gazing wistfully upon the balls above her head; then pressing her hand upon her wildly throbbing heart, she entered,

advanced timidly to the counter, and laid her burden upon it.

"This is silver," said the man, suspiciously ;
"how much do you want upon it—that is, if it is
come by honestly—for we do not receive stolen
property?"

"She is in black, sir," remarked a woman who
stood beside her, "and looks the remains of
decency ; indeed, Mr. John, the goods is value,
and not likely to be released ; so give what is
wanted for the article."

"And how much may that be, sweetheart?"
asked the man, laughing.

"A pound or more, sir, if you please."

"A pound ! Well, in all honesty I will not
dispute it with you ; but what crest is this?"

"It is my mother's crest."

"And who may your mother be—but there,
never mind. You need not cry, it will be all the
same by-and-bye—the name. What is the name?"

"Lily."

The man laughed heartily at this unsophisti-
cated answer, then said, with a mocking leer—

"That won't do; who sent you with the caddy?"

"My mother."

"And who is your mother?" again demanded the man, grinning at the tears that again started to Lily's eyes, despite her efforts to suppress them.

"My mother is the widow of Colonel Werter, sir."

"Tell the Christian and surname, dear," urged the woman who had before spoken.

"Florence Werter," faltered the terrified child.

"That will do at last, my blossom," said the man; "and here is the money."

The little girl clenched her hand upon the silver coins and ran from the place, forgetting in her hurry the remainder of the lesson her mother had given her.

It was her first bargain with a stranger, her first truly stern meeting with the world, or with those whose natures were so different from her own, and she shrank within herself, heartsick and frightened at the contact.

Dashing wildly into the apartment where Florence awaited her return, she triumphantly laid the money on her lap, and laughed loudly to hide the fierce war that was fighting in her soul.

"A pound," said Mrs. Werter, counting over the coins, "this will stop the gap awhile; but, child, where is the ticket?"

"The ticket! What ticket?"

"The duplicate that the man gave you. I hope that you have not lost it."

"He—he gave me none," she gasped, horrified at the prospect of returning to the pawnbroker's.

"Then you must go back for it—poor Lily. You are as white as death. Look up; are you ill, my darling?"

The girl flung her arms round her mother's neck, and wept passionately on her bosom.

"It is a hard—hard trial for you, and for me too, my child," murmured Florence, whose tears now mingled with those that wetted the golden curls upon her breast.

Kind words seldom fail in their power over the young heart, and Lily wiped away all trace of her agitation at their soothing tones.

"I am ready now, mother dear," said the brave little girl, looking up cheerfully, even while her lip quivered with her recent struggle.

"So am I," returned Florence, reaching for her bonnet; "I shall accompany you."

"No, that you shall not; they shall never see you within that door."

Lily spoke stoutly, remembering the man's rude laughter; and fortified as it were by her mother's affection, she went back to the pawn office, and executed the remainder of her business satisfactorily.

That evening a heap of work was showered upon the sempstress, and nimbly the fingers of the little girl assisted until it was completed.

Miss Raymond, who kindly brought home the finished jobs of her own getting, sternly refused to have anything to do with the batch now on hand, which was obtained through other sources, or rather by the recommendation of the gentleman in Drumcondra; so of course the Wertens had to do so themselves.

It was a long walk from Gloucester Place to Harecourt Street, and through the most central

part of the city; but Florence and Lily kept as retired as possible until they came to Stephen's Green, where they were pushed and jostled unmercifully by the number of people who thronged from Grafton Street, which made them hurry on the faster, until they mounted the steps of the house they were in quest of.

Mrs. Werter rang modestly, and had to repeat it many times before the servant condescended to answer the undemonstrative summons. Then looking at the figures before him from head to foot, and seeming not very well satisfied with the scrutiny, he went away after pointing to a hall chair and signing them to be seated.

The poor lady remained standing, until a waiting woman, seeing her so long in one position, asked if her message had been taken by anyone.

Lily involuntarily glanced at her mother at the girl's question, and found her dressed in a widow's cap and bonnet, a black shawl, but with a dark blue dress.

"Why did you come out thus?" she asked, holding up a fold of her mother's gown, after the servant had taken the bundle to her mistress.

The widow was embarrassed at the question, but made no reply.

Florence had kept many struggles from her children's knowledge, and even Lily knew not of a bargain which she had made ten days previously with a pedlar for her black dresses, who, happening to have a mourning order on his hands, refused all coloured clothing. It was not without selling other treasures that she had parted with a wedding gift—the silver tea-caddy.

The waiting maid returned with the lady's request that "the workwoman would call again for payment."

"It cannot be helped, and we can come to-morrow," whispered Lily, as they went away.

She puzzled her brains for a long time to find out her mother's reason for adopting the blue dress; but gave it up in despair. So she jogged along, trying to keep up a one-sided conversation by lively remarks as they passed the various establishments that attracted her childish notice.

Perceiving that her mother was not well pleased at the prospect of a second application of the

claim upon the rich debtor, Lily said, cheerfully—

“We have a good deal left out of the pound from the pawn office, mother dear, so do not annoy yourself about it. This will be a nice walk for me in the morning if I can get the money from the lady without your coming. Oh!” she added, stopping at a confectioner’s and trying to draw a smile to her mother’s lips, “look at those tarts, they are so tempting, would you not like one?”

“No,” replied Mrs. Werter, at last, breaking silence; “but you shall.”

She drew the half-reluctant little girl into the shop as she spoke, and asked for a penny tart. The shopwoman papered one, and handed it across the counter; but Florence, when about paying for the cake, found that her purse was gone. Trembling and terrified, she searched for it in vain, remembering as she did so the crush at the corner of Grafton Street on their way with the work, and to have felt her skirt dragged down, while a ragged boy, blaming its length,

for tripping him, crossed towards the trees of Stephen's Green, and fled from her sight.

Her purse, with the remainder of the pound for the caddy, had been taken; and, replacing the cake upon the counter, Florence drew Lily away in silence.

Florence Werter's life seemed at this time to have been made up of either petty annoyances or severe trials; still her true heart never wavered, her brave spirit never faltered. Cheerfully she worked for her children's sake, and was gratified to be free from the devices of her enemy. Well for her she did not know that even now the influence of Fitzroy's demoniacal hatred was hastening towards her.

The next morning, as Colonel Werter's widow was nerving herself for a repetition of the same distressing ordeal of the day before, an unforeseen event occurred to frustrate her plans.

She was waiting patiently in Mr. Tottenham's hall, Harcourt Street, for the fulfilment of her just demands, when she was startled by a gentleman, who, as he lounged leisurely down the stairs, stared rudely at her.

Without a word of apology, or even taking his cigar from his lips, the young officer—for such he evidently was—accosted her—accosted her the refined, but reduced lady, and with such assurance as made her flee from the house forgetful of her errand ; of everything except that the barbed arrow of insult was rankling in her heart, and that her whole being was roused to indignation and contempt.

Poor Florence, even this event is a coil in the enemy's chain, and will be a triumph for Fitzroy.

CHAPTER IX.

IN SEARCH OF A HOME.

*"Spargi una mesta lagrima
Su questo pegno allor."*

*"And on this pledge shed thou
A mournful tear."*

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR.

WHEN Edmond Fitzroy adopted the cowardly proceeding of anonymous letter writing, for the purpose of reducing Florence Werter to such poverty as might oblige her to accept his suit, he did not imagine that it would have been the means of driving her from her humble home, as he concluded it had done, when he discovered Woodbine Cottage to be empty. Cursing his folly in dallying so long about the settled determination of inducing her to accept his hand by fair, or compelling her to do so by foul means ; and trusting his power of eloquence to disclaim any knowledge of Eleanor Fairfield, which would satisfy her

honourable scruples, he lost no time in endeavouring to discover her retreat; and having learned through the parent of one of the pupils that the schoolmistress had gone to Ireland for the purpose of attending on her invalid son, he was soon following upon her track.

He already knew that Charlie and Bamber had been placed in a school at Rathmines by the kindness of Dean Netherwell; but of his death he had heard nothing, until the master of the establishment informed him of it.

This gentleman, however, could give no further information about the widow than that she had taken away her son in a cab, but in what direction he did not notice.

Mr. Fitzroy, who had not returned to his home in Grosvenor Square since he told his valet that he was going to Brighton, promising to be back on the ensuing morning, had remitted frequent sums of money to that sagacious functionary for the house expenses; but alone as he now felt himself to be in the Irish metropolis, as yet little known, and feeling a desire for the useful companionship of his old servant, he wrote to

summon him forthwith, and the elated John delayed not to obey.

"From Ireland," grinned the valet, holding the envelope towards his disappointed sweetheart. "There, fairest, you see you might not have been in such a hurry with your wedding trumpery. I told you we were not to be married till the master came back. So now unless you get another lad to stand proxy for me, we will have to wait awhile I fancy. Ha! ha! twenty pounds to begin house-keeping with; but hide your blushes, pretty one, or rather let us drown them in a tankard of Sally's ale; and if you drop a tear within, it will make it not the saltier, but the sweeter; so says the renowned poet, John Gorman."

The valet kissed the girl, and performed a graceful pirouette upon the kitchen floor, whether to hide his grief at parting, or in imagination feeling the effects of the liquors he coveted, is best known to himself.

John was received by his master with unfeigned pleasure; he brought with him the agreeable tidings that Mr. Norcott and family had left Lily-mount, and they were on their way to New York.

The latter piece of information was fresh from the valet's own invention ; however, it served to put the gentleman in the best of good humour, and so Gorman's conscience was appeased.

It mattered very little to most people where the unfortunate Mr. Norcott and his sister had betaken themselves ; his aim was to get out of England as soon as possible, and so escape a country fraught alone with danger and suffering to him ; he determined, however, first to make an effort in discovering their uncle, with whom Ella should remain, for no entreaties could persuade him to allow her to follow his uncertain fortunes.

After considerable difficulty and delay, Frederick at length learned that the residence of Sir Gordon Travers was Cappa House, in the South of Lincolnshire, and thither the miserable couple made their solitary way.

Scorning to enrich himself by any means that came from the hand of Edmond Fairfield, preferring rather the direst affliction that fate might bestow upon him, Mr. Norcott fled from his own enemy and the destroyer of his sister's happiness, provided only with whatever money belonged to

himself after Ella had discharged the debts already mentioned, and which he thought sufficient to carry them at least to Lincolnshire, from whence he would trust to chance to cover his own escape to whatever country appeared most desirable.

Having driven past Hertford they stopped for a night near Stevenage, and deep as was the sorrow of Mrs. Fairfield, her heart throbbed with enthusiasm as she gazed for the first time on the dwelling of one whose masterly mind is the delight and admiration of kingdoms, whose genius had cheered many of her own weary hours, and whose works while they were the theme of warm praise to millions, had been felt deeply though silently within her own soul. After gazing long on Knebworth, the home of Lord Bulwer Lytton, and with a heart soothed by the cessation of bitter memories, while her mind was busy with his greatness, Eleanor Fairfield turned to the humblest shelter they could procure for the night.

The wanderers believed that detection from Earl De Burg, or from any other source was least likely to occur in the quiet course their means

obliged them to pursue—this alone would have reconciled Ella to any position, however lowly.

At daybreak next morning they resumed their journey. Cambridge, Huntingdon, Peterboro', all were left behind; but as they quitted the latter town on their way to the next, they found that their little store was completely exhausted, and they were obliged to travel on foot. Too proud to beg, too fearful to ask assistance where it could be given, and so, hungry, homeless and wretched, they still made their way to Lincolnshire.

Carrying her child, and cheering Frederick, Ella trudged on for days together, selling each article that she had taken with her to supply the wants of her companions, until they were destitute of all except the soiled and tattered garments which they wore; still sore-footed and weary they went on, where they knew not, only to get as far away as possible from Lillymount and all pertaining to its memory, and reach Cappa House sometime.

In this condition Hatty, unaccustomed to cold or hardship, gave way under it, and pined until

she was almost reduced to a living skeleton. She had never hungered or thirsted before this day, for the mother's care failed not to provide for the child even when want stared most savagely at herself. But now at last she heard the low wail of what she thought was famine from Hatty's lips, without possessing the means of soothing the awful pangs.

They had reached Lincolnshire at last, and wandered into a sort of forest, where the exhausted Frederick threw himself on the wet grass, unable to move a step farther.

Night was beginning to spread its thick mantle over a lowering sky, and a single star beamed above their heads; they could discern little more than the surrounding trees, and no sound fell upon Ella's ear except the faint wailing of her suffering child, and the deep sigh of sorrow that burst so frequently from her brother's heart.

Rendered desperate by their situation rather than her own, Mrs. Fairfield looked about in hopes of obtaining means to alleviate their sufferings, but was only greeted still by that moan of Hatty's, with the repeated murmurs, "Oh!

mamma, I am so sick and tired, so sick and tired."

Mad with despair, the unfortunate lady made the child nestle upon the man's bosom and fled from the trees down a serpentine avenue, through a large gate, and out upon the deserted highway again; she ran along until she came to a house, with light streaming through the windows; she pushed in the door, which was partially open, and entered a parlour, where the family were assembled at their evening meal.

"Will you give me some bread?" she asked, heeding not the astonishment of all present. "Give me food, for those who are very dear to me are starving yonder in the forest."

"Out, girl, how dare you come here thus," cried a portly gentleman, who sat at the head of the table, while he scornfully eyed the faded silk dress which the intruder wore. "Out, I say, this moment, how dare you sully my daughter's presence with your brazen-faced impudence. Forest! as if there was a forest in this part of the world."

"She means Lincondoon, papa," lisped a little

boy, "part of the demesne is like a forest, it is there we get the birds' nests."

"Husband," said an elderly lady, peering into the miserable face now turned towards her, "this girl is not what you take her to be, pity she did not go to Lincondoon, where she would have been more kindly treated."

"Always harping upon that string. Lincondoon's hospitality, Lincondoon's charity, Lincondoon's this and that for ever."

"Lady, you look very hungry," murmured the boy's soft voice. "Mamma, may I give her my bread and jam. I have got enough."

"I—I am sorry," stammered the gentleman, after taking a closer survey of the trembling woman before him. "I am sure I did not intend making the mistake, but if you will have this bread and meat—"

"I will have it with thanks." Ella interrupted the polite speech by clutching greedily at the proffered food, and darting from the house.

Hunger was busy at its work within herself, and she kept the tempting morsel from her sight lest she should devour the whole before the appe-

tites of her beloved companions had been appeased. She had watched her path attentively as she came along, that she should not go astray on her return, and found no difficulty in regaining the spot where she had left Hatty and Frederick—they were gone. She called upon them frantically, imagining no end of horrible things to have happened in her absence, but her own voice grew fainter at each call, which echoed through the trees and down the lonely glades, until it boomed again upon her ear with a momentous burden.

Flinging aside the food that a moment before would have been luxury to have tasted, Mrs. Fairfield threw herself upon the grass, where their forms had last been pressed, and prayed for the release of death. Thus she lay how long she never knew, until she was aroused by footsteps running towards her. She started up and glared rather than looked through the deepening shadows, and saw Frederick hastening towards her, with Hatty pressed tightly to his breast. He was deeply agitated, and almost breathless. Ella leaned eagerly forward to snatch the child from him, but shrank back again in a moment, for the

lips that met her own were more like those of a corpse than of a living thing.

"She will die if you have not food," he said, "she cried for water—I heard a stream running yonder, but when I filled a leaf with some she had not strength to swallow it—see, she breathes more freely now."

Hatty looked up, she had felt her mother's tears upon her cheek, and pointed in the direction of the rivulet. Mrs. Fairfield offered her some food, but she turned from it, and again entreated for water. They carried her to the river's brink, and she drank greedily of the refreshing element, but would not partake of either bread or meat.

The craving of famine could no longer be borne, even in the grief-sick breast of Ella, and she eat heartily, while Frederick, choosing the nicest morsels for her, devoured the coarser pieces himself with wonderful gusto. When their appetites were appeased, he tied the fragments of their meal in a handkerchief, and looked more anxiously upon the sinking child.

"We must get her some milk, but where can we go that is not full of danger?"

"I saw a few cottages on the roadside, there we might not fear, let us go thither."

Mrs. Fairfield took the child in her arms, and led the way from what they supposed to be a forest, but which was in reality part of the demesne of a gentleman who was never known to close his door to those who sought his charity.

Stopping at one of the little houses that Ella had remarked, the wayfarers hesitated before disturbing the inhabitants, who seemed to have retired for the night; but one glance at the pallid face that lay upon her bosom determined Mrs. Fairfield to knock gently; she had not to repeat the summons, for instantly the latch was raised, and a girl looked from the half-opened door.

"Can you lodge us for the night, or give me a cup of milk for my sick little child?"

The girl looked fixedly at the person who asked her charity before replying.

"I can give you the milk, but not the lodging." She withdrew her head, but soon returned with what was wanted.

"If you had gone for shelter to Lincondoon," she added, "you would not have been refused it."

I would advise you to do so yet, for it is never too late for a welcome there ; here we have neither bed nor room."

"Lincondoon, we have just come from that," replied Ella, remembering the boy's remarks where she had obtained the bread and meat, and trembling with renewed fears for Hatty, who had turned from the milk as she had turned from the food.

"Then more's the pity, for there every one is received with kindness, the commonest vagrant that ever stepped leaves a blessing on the head of the master of that hospitable mansion. Why, bless my heart, you must be a stranger in this part if you have never heard of Lincondoon. Poor lady, go thither with your child, and you will get what aid you want, the little thing looks bad enough. In the meantime, take the milk with you, cup and all." She shut the door without waiting for any thanks, and Ella turned away in silence.

"We must not go there," said Frederick, "we dare not go to a rich man's dwelling where

"I may be detected; no, we cannot go to London."

"But for Hatty's sake," pleaded Ella. "Oh! Frederick, for Hatty's sake; she will die if something be not done for her at once; it is not hunger that is the matter with her. Oh! no it is not hunger!"

"I tell you we dare not go thither, unless indeed you set more value upon her life than on Fairfield's or mine; are not the bloodhounds on my track, and think not that I would die singly, even if you wished it?"

"Oh! Frederick, I shall do as you desire, only do not speak of that again—my child, my poor little girl, what must I do to save her?"

Mr. Norcott bent over the feeble little frame, and knew that life was ebbing fast away.

"Poor sister, no earthly power can save her now—a little while, a very little while, and she will be where trouble cannot reach her."

"Then she is dying;" the wretched mother spoke with a wailing sob, and her eyes were turned to her brother's as if seeking hope in

them, but there was no hope to give, and she held her face closer to the child's.

"Hatty, my darling, do you not know me?"

The weary eyelids quivered as if incapable of any further attempt to open.

"How white she looks. Hatty, oh! Hatty, my darling; do you not know me?"

Again there was a quiver of the eyelids, and the shadow of a smile fleeting across the livid lips, but that was all.

"Oh! if she could but speak one word, even give me one look of recognition. Hatty, my darling, do you not know me?"

Fast fell the mother's tears upon the pallid face, but no response, no sign from the dying child showed that they were either felt or understood.

"My child, my precious one," moaned poor Ella; "never more to speak—never more to bless me with her love. Oh! Frederick, it is very, very hard, to part from her—to part, and thus—"

Mrs. Fairfield looked around upon the night shadows—the dismal scene—her kind and

generous brother bowed to the dust in grief for her, the little form on her lap—her only child, her dying Hatty—she herself seated on the kerb stone by the road side, poor and friendless, without a shelter for her head, or for the cherished sufferer on her knee. Yes, it was a dismal scene, never was human heart more utterly forlorn than hers, as there she sat, poor and homeless, shivering in the mighty sorrow that oppressed her.

A quivering sigh from the dying child recalled her wandering attention.

“She might be able to swallow a little water,” suggested Frederick, taking Hatty from Ella’s arms, for he knew that the death struggle was now coming.

She ran back to Lincondoon, through the gate, that always seemed to remain open, and flinging away the milk, returned with a cup of water.

“She—she does not want it now,” faltered Frederick; “she is not able to swallow it—she is worse. I think she is very near death.”

“She is dead!” interrupted the mother, with the fierceness of despair; “Frederick Norcott,

you know that she is dead, and want to prevaricate. You sent me away that she might die in your arms and not in mine."

"Do not blame me. I would have saved you from this sudden sorrow ; even before you left her hands were clenched, as her head fell back upon my shoulder ; she died without a sigh, calm and peacefully ; she is in heaven now—see thus poor Hatty breathed her last. Yes, she is an angel, does she not look like one?"

Mrs. Fairfield did not seem to hear her brother's words, there was a wild and fearful anger in her eyes, they seemed to glare in a paroxysm of lunacy, and from her manner no other conclusion could be come to.

"Villain ! murderer ! you have killed my child !"

Mr. Norcott, in utter horror and amazement shrank from the frenzied woman, screening the little corpse as much as possible from her view.

"Yes, you killed my child to avenge the injury her father did both you and me—away, away from my sight for ever."

She waved her hand as if to keep him off, and looked wildly down the road.

"My poor Ella," said Mr. Norcott, in soothing tones, "calm yourself, this language—your manner altogether, is unnatural."

"No," she interrupted; "I will not calm myself. You have taken all from me, my husband, my home, and now my child."

What could he say? what could he do to pacify her mad ravings? every endearing epithet he used seemed but to add to her passion; at length as, though inspired by some mysterious power, he leaned over her, and muttered in a deep and thrilling voice—

"Eleanor—you are a traitress, accuse me of this vile thing again, and Edmond Fairfield shall stand with me upon the same gallows e'er many suns have set."

She started and looked eagerly into his face; it was but for a second, then the light of reason faded from her eyes again.

"What have you done with Hatty?" she asked; "where have you put her?"

Mr. Norcott seized the hand of the wretched woman, and forced her to turn her eyes from his face to the body of the child.

"Ella," he said, "if you were not insane, you would not use a language that has the power of goading me to desperation; that starts the demon in my breast afresh, the demon that first struggled into life with your cry of hunger. When lifting your wan face from the straw pallet in our London lodgings, you craved for the crust I had not to give you, do you remember, Ella?"

"Yes, and Hatty was hungry too," she answered, now listening attentively.

"She was hungry too," he resumed; "I fled from you both with that cry still ringing in my ears, and was met on London bridge by Fitzroy, then a total stranger, but who I now know to be Edmond Fairfield; he was attracted by my desperate aspect, and offered me the wherewithal to gain the food you begged for, it mattered little how I obtained it, or for what bribery; suffice it I sank that night to the lowest depth of crime and villainy; but then it was for you, Ella, and you were all the world to me."

"Go on, tell me more," she cried, meekly ; for Mr. Norcott had paused in extreme agitation.

"Yet you, for whom I have done so much, have doubted me—worse than doubted, you have accused me of Hatty's murder. You have turned like a serpent on the breast that sheltered you ; there, take your child from my arms, and when looking upon her dead features, remember how deeply you have wronged me."

She took the lifeless form mechanically, as if not knowing what she was doing, then pushed the hair from her brow with a weary sigh.

"Is this Hatty," she asked, but there was no answer, for Frederick had laid his arms upon a low wall behind the kerbstone with his head bent upon them, and his now emaciated figure was shaking with the sobs that rent his faithful heart.

"Was she mad?" he wondered, "would she stay mad, she—his sister—his love, his one idol, through all his changeful life."

"Fred." The monosyllable came as a voice from heaven, it was so long since she had called him Fred.

"My dear sister," he said, going to her, "You are better, you are calm now."

She looked up with the old loving glance, and all traces of her recent frenzy had disappeared; he bent lower, and saw that the dead face was drenched with tears.

"Oh! Fred; if we could procure a coffin, even a rude one."

"That she shall have."

"How, or where can we seek it; are we not vagrants?"

"No, not we, Ella; you are a good and a free woman."

"But the risk?"

"It can only be a risk to me, and I am nothing."

She looked at him in astonishment.

"Nothing. Why, Frederick, how can you say that; are you not everything to me now—now that she is gone."

"You said I killed her, that I robbed you of your husband, home and child."

"Oh! no. I could not have said that. I never said it."

"It is past. You were mad or something like it, when you so spoke. No wonder, God help you, poor girl, no wonder."

Ella fell upon her knees, and held the little corpse towards him.

"Forgive me, Fred, humbly I implore you, for I knew not then what I said or did."

Tenderly he raised and pressed her to his heart, nothing could uproot the love he bore his sorrow-stricken sister.

Tearing off the only covering that protected her shoulders, Ella wrapped it round the still form of Hatty and sobbed, "One kiss more, my darling, it is almost the last your mother can ever give you, and it has broken her heart. Look, Frederick, I severed this lock from the tiny head that will never nestle on my breast again."

Mr. Norcott gently took the body from her arms, and folded the mantle closely over it.

"Yes," said Mrs. Fairfield, "keep it wrapped thus, it will save her from—from what? Oh! Frederick, from the worms. No, no, no; give me back my child, or get a shroud and coffin and a decent burial."

"Poor Ella, it is well the dead feels nothing of our mortal sorrow. Yes, Hatty shall have a shroud, a coffin and a decent burial."

CHAPTER X.

IN SEARCH OF A GRAVE.

"She was the idol of each heart,
Bright sunshine to the eye,
And seemed as though of heaven a part,
A star come from the sky."

LONELY HOUSE.

SADLY Mr. Norcott and Ella began to retrace their steps towards Lincondoon, not to seek shelter for the night in that friendly mansion, but to cower under the shadow of the trees, and keep their sacred vigils beside the dead, with nothing but the blue sky above them.

A little down the road they were overtaken by a party of gentlemen equestrians, whose merry laughter and loud jests grated harshly on the ears of the homeless wanderers. It was evident the gay huntsmen, for such they appeared, were returning in jovial good humour at this late hour after a fine day's sport.

“Lincondoon looks inviting, even in its stillness,” said one—“what fun it would be to gallop round the grounds now ; this troop of horse’s hoofs would make her ladyship imagine she was besieged.”

“Gad, the Baronet would enjoy the joke,” returned another. “However, her ladyship, knowing that we are all staying at her husband’s lodge those nights, would understand the freak well enough.”

Mr. Norcott lost the remainder of what might have been said, in the interest he felt at a name then mentioned by a third speaker.

“Here, Somers, give me one of your cigars, they are always better than mine. Gad, major, it is to be hoped that the Honourable Jane will never fall out with their flavour.”

Major Somers ! Ella started violently at the name, and cowered closer to the wall until the party was out of sight.

The merry group did not, however, ride through Lincondoon, but cantered off in a different direction, leaving our poor way-farers all the more miserable, for the very happiness

that bore so great a contrast to their own destiny.

Through the gate they passed, and down upon the damp grass was the precious burden laid ; sweet little Hatty, through all that long and lonely night staid those two breaking hearts beside her silent bier, with nothing but the stars to keep them company, and the rustling leaves to drown the panting of their weary breasts.

Frederick watched for the first break of dawn to hide the lustre of those twinkling lights ; it came at last, and taking Ella's hand lovingly between his own, he pointed to the sky above them.

" It is morning "

" Yes, it is morning " she replied. "

" What shall we do ? "

" I—I know not— "

" Cover her with leaves and hide her here until we find a fitter burial. "

" No, oh ! no, Fred. "

" What must it be then ? yonder is a church-

yard; you remember we passed it a little way down the road."

"Yes, let us hide her there—ah! it matters little now, but still is it not dreadful thus, without a coffin?"

"She shall have it. I swear that she shall have it later."

They started on their sad mission. Reverently were the dear remains carried in Frederick's arms, and his emotion could hardly be controlled as his eyes wandered from its marble features to the scarcely less pallid ones that moved so patiently on beside him.

On reaching the burial ground they found the gate locked, as might have been expected; however, a little farther on they perceived a gap in the wall where workmen had evidently been engaged in rebuilding, and through this they passed. Silently they trod upon the grass grown graves until they came to a fitting spot in which they were to temporarily dispose of the dead.

Mr. Norcott laid down his burden, and began to search for an instrument to dig with; he thought the workmen might have left some about,

but nothing of the kind presented itself, and the daylight was glowing full upon them before he came on the fragment of an old spade. The grave was completed at length, and Mrs. Fairfield took a last embrace of her child's remains. Gently was it placed within that narrow cell, reverently each sod was laid upon the little form, wrapped so carefully up in its novel shroud, then Frederick and Ella knelt down and prayed.

Mrs. Fairfield was the first to rise, and she stood gazing in awe upon her brother's face; it was raised pleading to heaven, with an expression upon its noble features that rendered it sublime in its holy penitence; it was white as death, and stained with the tears he was incapable of controlling, he seemed unconscious of her presence, unconscious of everything, except that his heart and thoughts were lifted from this world and all its weary troubles, to the better one above.

At last Ella's voice broke the stillness of that strange and thrilling scene.

"Fred, forgive me for the wrong that I have done you."

He turned, and his clasped hands shook as he repeated—

“Forgive you, Ella? You do not fancy I could harbour a thought that was not full of brotherly tenderness for you. What you said was but the frenzy of your heavy grief, it was not your heart, but that which spoke.”

“It was not, Fred ; and here, on Hatty’s grave, forget it.”

“It is forgotten. Come away now, for the sun is full upon us, and we dare not tarry here.”

After a lingering look upon the fresh-made mound, Mrs. Fairfield left the spot in silence, fully determined that Hatty should not remain many hours in her uncoffined grave, for once having found Cappa House, she knew that her relatives would take pity on her wretched story. On regaining the highway Mr. Norcott seemed uncertain which way to take. Cappa House must still be far distant, and they could not starve until they reached it ; but they had been long enough about this locality, and to remain would not bring them further on their journey ; so after

a little consideration, they took the road which the huntsmen had taken on the previous night.

So far every enquiry regarding Cappa House had been futile, and they now made up their minds to ask boldly if a Sir Gordon Travers lived near or in the vicinity of Lincondoon—but all opportunities for such enquiries seemed at an end, for they found themselves in an open country without a habitation for miles around, or a human being to be seen.

After plodding onward for what seemed to Mrs. Fairfield an age, but which was in reality but a couple of hours, she sank exhausted beside a hedge in a deserted field utterly unable to proceed. Frederick induced her to partake of some of the food they had saved on the night before, and despite her anxiety to procure some friendly assistance in obtaining a proper burial for her child, Ella slept soundly until the evening was far advanced.

With desolation in their hearts, and despair weighing heavily upon their souls, the wanderers again proceeded on their weary way ; and again the evening stars began to come forth, for their

progress had been very tardy, owing to the exhausted state, not only of Mrs. Fairfield but of Frederick, who felt the effects of his recent illness telling perceptibly upon him.

"Did you not feel a drop?" asked Ella, raising her face towards the sky, and holding out her shaking hand; for, as if to add to their discomfort, the rain now began to fall; but with this misfortune they saw a light at a short distance glimmering through a cluster of trees.

"It is a house," cried Frederick. "Thank heaven, it is a shelter at last."

They had only walked six miles since morning, but felt them to be countless; and although both had slept and rested many hours on the way, they were but a moment previously unable to proceed another step; when, however, that welcome light burst full upon them, all fatigue was forgotten, and they hastened forward as though they had never known it.

"What a fanciful building," remarked Frederick, looking at it with curiosity in the gathering gloom.

"Hark! what is that?" Ella clung to her

brother, for a loud laugh as though in mockery at their own forlorn position burst upon the night stillness with startling distinctness.

Another and another peal of the same merriment from different voices came through the well lighted windows, and Mr Norcott shrank from asking for lodging in a scene of such hilarity ; the strangeness of their position came also for the first time vividly before his mind. How should he account for either Ella or himself, or what explanation could he offer for their extraordinary plight—they might almost be taken for beggars.

After lingering about for a few moments longer and finding the rain now falling in torrents, Mr. Norcott at last summoned courage to knock ; he was answered by the barking of dogs, furious animals they seemed to be, by the terrible yells that followed. Yells that seemed to be from another world, for what between the laughter of men, the tearing, barking, and screaming of about fifty dogs, and the running to and fro of four times that many heavy paws, poor Mr. Norcott and his sister fled horrified at the unearthly din, and took refuge under a friendly tree.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MASTER.

"There is a deep nick in Time's restless wheel
For each man's good, when which nick comes, it strikes."

CHAPMAN.

WITH the rain beating upon them—for the heavy wind rendered their shelter but a nominal one—Mrs. Fairfield cowered beside her brother, and listened fearfully to the scuffle which took place within the house, where they had determined to ask for a night's repose.

Presently someone opened the door, and a voice called out—

"Who is there?"

But the unfortunate wanderers had not sufficiently recovered from their fright to answer.

"Confound that fellow!" continued the speaker, "not to have put those dogs into their kennel until they terrified the life out of someone—for as sure as I live someone knocked."

It was evident that the canine animals were disposed of, so Mr. Norcott drew Ella from her hiding place; but the stranger had re-entered the house, and they were again preparing to knock, when a figure issued from under the very tree that had been sheltering them.

"A woman in all this rain," said the man, in a low voice.

"Can—will you shelter her?"

"We want shelter, both of us," pleaded Mrs. Fairfield.

"Is she your wife?"

"She is my sister, and in sore distress; help her if you can."

"And yourself?"

"For myself I do not care, I am used to rough it."

"Nay, sir, that you are not; but come with me—gently, if you please—for, as you may perceive, I am but a servant."

"Your master should object, I know; but this is no time to talk of scruples."

"Object—no, sir; there you are mistaken. But if he knew that strangers sought his hospi-

talities, he would be making too much fuss about them—even to the detriment of his own comfort—for we are rather pinched for room at present. Come, sir, follow me.”

Without seeking any farther explanation, Mr. Norcott and his sister obeyed in silence. He brought them to what appeared to be the rear of the house; and, after passing through a shrubbery, they entered the kitchen.

It was scrupulously clean, and the glowing fire danced merrily in the enormous grate, illuminating the whole apartment.

A young and pretty girl was knitting at a table, singing softly, as her nimble fingers hovered over the needles.

She started to her feet with an exclamation of surprise when the strangers stood before her.

“My goodness, father! how you startled me—but I beg pardon, ma’am.”

“This lady requires your friendly aid,” explained the man, interrupting the girl’s apologies.

“That she does, poor lady; she is dripping with rain.”

She drew Mrs. Fairfield to the fire, and helped

to take off some of her damp clothing, replacing them with comfortable articles out of her own wardrobe.

"She is a gentlewoman," thought the girl; "I know by her hands and feet, they are so small and white; married too—for here is a wedding ring. Some love match, I suppose, which they say sometimes turns out unfortunately, and which her grey hair seems to prove. I think she is as young as myself; but, gracious me, what is the matter now?"

The last question was the only exclamation that found vent, and was caused by the violent sobbing of the stranger, who, more like a dead than a living woman, had pressed her head against the wall, and gave way to the emotion that she had so long struggled to keep back.

"Poor thing," murmured the man, kindly; "get her some food and warm milk, Marian, and she will be all the better after."

But Ella gently waived aside the proffered refreshment, and thanking them gratefully, asked to be permitted to lie down.

The host looked embarrassed at the request, but

she set about ingratiating herself in the favour of the interesting lady, for she dearly loved to listen to a story of the heart. But Marian found Mrs. Fairfield completely averse to any conversation of that kind, and she turned to leave the room in rather a sulky mood.

"You are very kind to think of the tea," said Ella, as an apology for not accepting it; "but why are you leaving me so soon?"

"I am going to get the gentlemen's and the master's breakfast ready, madam."

"Is this place a farm?"

"Bless you, no, lady; it is the hunting lodge of Lincondon. The baronet is here now with a party of his friends, which happened unfortunately for you, as we were so full, and the accommodation not over large; all the rooms were occupied last night, and I had not a better one to give you than this."

"It is very comfortable, thank you; but tell me who this master is, of whom you speak so much."

Marian was hurrying from the chamber when Mrs. Fairfield asked the question. She was,

however, not arrested by it, but by the white hand that she had before admired, for it was laid upon hers with a detaining earnestness.

“One of the best men in the world,” answered Marian; “certainly the best gentleman that ever lived, and the kindest to the poor.”

“May heaven bless him, whoever he may be,” murmured Ella, “for he seems a friend to every one.”

“You may well say that, and he is not only the plainest, but the most humble creature in existence; no one would ever take him to be the sort of a man he is, for his appearance is nothing to boast of.”

“What is he like? Describe him.”

“He is middle height—that is not near so tall as your brother—white haired, the little he has of it, for the top of his head is bald, which, in my opinion, sets off to better advantage his benevolent face. He has laughing blue eyes and a ruddy complexion, although he has sailed through a sea of trouble. In fact master, for I cannot help calling him master—every one does—is the pleasantest old gentleman that eyes were ever set

upon. Children smile as he passes, beggars bestow a blessing, and the rich their envy, for they can do nothing else, although even they respect him. So now, lady, that I have given you a fair description of master, I shall bring your breakfast thither, because you say you do not like to join the gentlemen, neither I am sure would you wish to sit at the same table with father and myself. For although you wear a faded gown I knew you are a gentlewoman. Hark! there is master's voice, and a sweet sound it is to every one about these parts. Come to the window; is it not a good face, that of master's? Ha! he has turned into the house again."

Marian stopped suddenly, for Ella grasped the sash tremblingly as she asked—

"Who is that young man standing apart, almost in the rear of those evergreens?"

"Oh! that is Major Somers, an intimate friend of master's, and the favourite of all the hunting parties far and near; not that he seems over fond of the sport himself, particularly of late, for the poor gentleman has got a love stroke."

"What mean you by a love stroke?" asked Ella, almost smiling at the girl's sympathetic countenance.

"Why," she answered, "he fell in love with a young widow, who turned out to be not altogether right you know, ma'am, and it has given him a terrible shock, poor gentleman?"

"Does she live near this?"

"Not now, and no one knows whither she is gone, for Lilymount was sold for the debts they say she helped her husband to incur, and Major Somers received a letter about a month ago, urging him to give her up—for it seems he wanted to marry her—because she had kept up during her husband's life an—an—what do you call it? in—in—something."

"Intrigue," suggested Mrs. Fairfield.

"Yes, an intrigue with her husband's friend, and was disgraced out of all society."

"Who was her husband?" questioned Ella, combing out her hair to hide the varying colour of her cheeks.

"Colonel Werter, of Lilymount; to be sure he was old enough to be her father, for he had a

daughter years older than the girl he married, and a hard life they had of it all together ; but they say that the wife had the upper hand, and that the husband adored the ground she walked upon."

"What was the man's name who—who—"

Mrs. Fairfield could get no further, but Marian helped her.

"The man who tempted her to sin ? his name was Mr. Fitzroy ; but in truth he was not so much to blame for being bewitched by her beauty, for she was a designing minx they say, and had just fallen in love with him, because he was the handsomest man in society, and that is saying a good deal considering Major Somers. But look out here and judge for yourself, for I hear the latter gentleman's voice in the garden ; but I forgot, as you never saw Mr. Fitzroy you cannot judge between them. However, come here ; is he not a splendid young gentleman ? and ought he not to bless his stars for escaping so great a Turk as that young widow must be."

Mrs. Fairfield answered the girl's remarks only by a few questions.

"Will these gentlemen leave here to-day?"

"They will go to the hunt of course, ma'am."

"But, as you would say yourself, for good and all?"

"For good and all! La, no; nor for a week to come."

"Then there is no fear of Major Somers not being here in the evening."

"None whatever."

Marian was beginning to fear that she had another designing widow before her.

"You will excuse my curiosity; but you have not told me the name of the gentleman to whose hospitality we owe the kindness of last night."

"Bless you, dear lady, it was nothing; why if you had gone straight to Lincondoon instead of to this little box, it might have been worth talking of. Lincondoon is a princely place; it used to be called Cappa House."

Mrs. Fairfield started and grasped the girl's arm convulsively.

"Cappa House, you say; you are sure of this. When was it changed, and why? Tell me, Marian, the name of him you call your master."

But Ella was speaking to the walls, for the rustic maiden had been called twice during her extolling of Lincondoon, and tripped from the room singing gaily as she went, leaving poor Mrs. Fairfield in a state of fearful agitation.

Ella had determined to seek an interview with Major Somers, and clear the character of her friend, for if he had, as Marian said, received a letter derogatory to Florence Werter, she knew from whence it came, and for what purpose. Had she known Audley better, she never would have come to that determination, for his mind could never have been biassed by a letter of the kind.

But the inadvertent mention of Cappa House put to flight every other thought from the brain of Mrs. Fairfield; her uncle's home, he who had stood in the light of a kind father to her.

Would he take her to his heart again? would he forgive her fondly loved brother. Cappa House, Lincondoon, at last.

CHAPTER XII.

JOHN GORMAN'S EXPERIENCE OF POLITE SOCIETY.

"And come we back unto our native home,
For want of skill to lose the wench thou lovest."

THE MERRY DEVIL OF EDMONTON.

MR. FITZBOY, making a virtue of a necessity, took John into his confidence respecting his present business in Ireland, and was rewarded by the valet's sagacity, who entered warmly into the spirit of the search after Mrs. Werter.

Rejoicing at any pretext which enabled him to procure his master's gold, and having no pity upon a purse that had hitherto been so tightly closed against him, John lavished upon his own pleasure the sums which the usurer imagined to be spent in car hire, bribes, &c., to those who could give any information concerning Florence. When the gentleman found fault with his extravagance, the servant declared it utterly impos-

sible to proceed in the matter if he were stinted in funds.

Upon one of those occasions, and when remonstrance had taken rather a serious turn, John swore that with the last pound he had gained a certain clue to the lady's residence from a person whom he had employed to reconnoitre the locality of Britain Street, and who had seen a widow, minutely answering the description of her they sought, enter a lodging house at the corner of Marlborough Street. Accordingly, the following morning Fitzroy took up his station in that quarter, but for days no such person met his anxious eye.

Upon the fifth evening, however, as Mr. Fitzroy was about crossing from the Rotundo, he beheld a dusky form, clad in the robes of widowhood, making its way towards the said Marlborough Street; he followed quickly, but when he was enabled to take a closer view of the retreating vision, he thought it rather of too portly a substance to belong to Mrs. Werter, and that the gait was of too hobbling a character for her youth and gracefulness.

Nothing daunted, he overtook a widow certainly, but one so "fat, fair, and forty," that the cheeks which the cap confined bulged out at either side of it as red as peony roses, and the expression of the face altogether was more a warning to living individuals to resist the temptation of supplanting the dead spouse, if he would keep his head straight upon his shoulders, than either a flag of distress or a modest intimation that the bereaved one was accessible to another matrimonial overture.

From this specimen of chubby widowhood Fairfield turned in disgust, but the lady having caught his involuntary grimace, raised her umbrella, and would have laid it smartly upon his shoulders had he not ogled and bowed so profoundly, that she must have taken both for admiration of her charms, for she smiled bewitchingly as he finished by taking off his hat.

Elated at her conquest, the lady invited him, not into a palace, but a sausage shop, intimating that she was the proprietress of the establishment, and kept the freshest trotters, puddings, sausages, &c., in Ireland. Nothing loath to

improve even this opportunity, he entered 'the greasy parlour, fanning himself with his perfumed pocket-handkerchief, to counteract the unsavory odours of pigs' feet, rancid butter, and a hundred such like objectionables.

"You are a foreigner, I perceive, sir," began the widow, dusting a chair with 'the corner of her apron before handing it to her guest.

"Scarcely, madam," replied the gentleman; "but, at least, I am a stranger in Dublin, and should feel grateful if you could direct me to a residence in Marlborough Street."

"You want to know the number of a certain house perhaps?"

"Yes; or if any of your people have seen a lady and a little girl, in deep mourning, about here, and will give me information concerning them, I will reward them handsomely. Both mother and child are very beautiful, to which I must attribute my apparent rudeness just now, as I took you, madam, for the individual I am in quest of."

Mrs. Sausage simpered, blushed, and fell into thought for a second; then, starting prettily, she said—

"Yes; surely, sir, I have seen those two lovely beings. The child has long golden hair, in thick wavy curls, rippling like a sunny river down her beautiful neck, with blue eyes like the stars above us."

Considering there were no stars just then, the gentleman smiled covertly, and she continued—

"You wonder at my language, but my husband, rest his soul, was an artist, and I have imbibed some of his refined tastes, which to the common herd, I know, have often seemed ridiculous, but by you, sir, they can be understood."

"And, doubtless," said Fitzroy, "when you saw the child with the golden ripples, you thought of the pleasure your husband would have had in painting so fair a picture. Both are beautiful, certainly, but very poor; this fact makes me all the more anxious to recover their address, which I have unluckily mislaid."

"You are the bearer of good tidings then?"

"Yes; news that will be most welcome to them in their present condition. A relative has just died, after leaving that young widow a splendid legacy; it is quite natural that I, who

am also a relative, should like to be the first to tell her of it."

"Quite, sir, quite; and very kind hearted of you—such nice feeling. How my dear Tommy would have appreciated this."

Mrs. Sausage hobbled to the door and called out—

"Sally; here, Sally, leave those puddings and come to me at once."

A greasy head popped into the room, and popped out again on seeing the stranger.

"Tell me, Sal," continued the mistress, "don't you remember a widow, very young and handsome—hem—like— why, like herself, I suppose, and a small child with the curls, that we were saying put us in mind of the cherub your master sketched so beautifully?"

"Here's the price of a new ribbon, Sally," said the gentleman; "so now try if you can tell me that child's name, and where she lives."

"Her name is Lily, sir," replied Sally; "but I cannot tell you where she lives. I heard her mother call her Lily, and that was all."

"Do you not think she lives in Marlborough Street?"

"La! no, sir, that she does not; for I often meet her of a Sunday when I goes to Mass, and it is always about Gloucester Place."

Fitzroy thanked the girl, who, grasping the silver coin, hurried away, doubtless fearing that her mistress would expect to share the reward; so she left her to make her own bargain with the stranger.

Before Edmond Fitzroy returned to his hotel, he hunted Gloucester Place for an hour, but with no success; however, in reporting his encounter to his valet, he made the best of it.

"All this I learned for two and sixpence," added the usurer, "while you have spent twenty-six pounds for nothing at all; even Marlborough Street was a delusion. John—John, this expense is inexplicable; it is killing."

"Yes, indeed, sir," returned the man dolefully, "you look ill, and it evidently does not agree with you."

"What does your flippant tongue drive at now?"

"Nothing, sir, except that it must be this chasing about after a lady, who may not be

worth the trouble, which is too much fatigue for one not accustomed to such exercise."

"Oh! no, it is not that; I am used up a little, and feel a strange pain across my heart."

"It is from enlargement, sir," suggested John.

"Enlargement!" repeated the other, not noticing the servant's irony, "Heaven forbid! for that is a fatal disease. Get me some claret, as I mean to lounge for an hour over my paper, after which I shall be quite restored."

John left the room to do his master's bidding, and whispered to the banisters as he went, "Aye, aye, my master; this money fever is enlargement of the heart, and no mistake, for it was never known before to burst open your purse strings. It don't agree with you; it don't, indeed, sir, for every coin is as dear to you as the blood that feeds that same heart of yours."

Just now the valet was enjoying a gentleman's life in Dublin. His favourite resort was the Opera, and although the prices were high, it mattered little, as long as his master's notes made his pocket lining. He adored Patti, and ad-

mired Santley. Der Freitschutz and Don Pasquale won a larger amount of his approbation than other performances, and the ladies in the dress boxes obtained more of his attention than those in the second circle; altogether John was beginning to forget his own identity, and imagine himself a person of no mean importance, mixing as he did with "fast young men" at the fashionable hotels and cafés, where they retired after the Opera to partake of a lobster salad, or any other dainty they required.

Vastly John enjoyed himself while Edmond Fitzroy believed him to be faithfully discharging his duty in hunting up the residence of Mrs. Werter. However, as he was entirely relying on chance, he did not understand why he could not hear something of her in the Theatre as well as in the streets, or by enjoying himself as well as poking about in a strange city. So as chance often turns out contrary to what we expect, Gorman was surprised at his own luck one night, when having joined some gentlemen at a renowned saloon, the conversation turning freely upon female beauty, a young officer, more sober

than his companions, avowed his mother's sempstress to be the handsomest woman in the universe.

Bets and coarse jests followed this remark, which the young man parried somewhat awkwardly, declaring the person alluded to was a reduced gentlewoman, and not to be approached with impunity.

"Then you have made advances?" laughed one.

"Yes. I saw her by chance, as I was passing through our hall, and made enquiries of my servant. I acknowledge I made some polite overtures towards an introduction; but they were repulsed with a ladylike firmness—a firmness not to be mistaken. Scapegrace though I am called, and unaccustomed to honour females of any grade, I felt an unaccountable respect for the beautiful girl—for girl she appeared to be—who, although reduced to the level of an hireling, knew how to sustain her position, by the gentle rectitude of her bearing."

"What a romantic greenhorn," remarked a brother officer, in a low voice.

"And what may be the divinity's name, of

whose dignity you are so careful?" laughed another, with mock gravity.

"Only this much. I have heard from my mother," replied the former speaker, now puffing his cigar lazily, "her name is Werter; her husband died in difficulties,"—puff—"and she lost every means of independence." Here a small cough accompanied a whiff. "Some titled person, who had intended the widow's daughter to be her heiress,"—a yawn and a puff—"having left this world—another glass of champagne, please—as I was saying, she having left this world without a will, of course her husband—blow the waiter, he has left a disgusting piece of cork in the bottle, which has floated into my glass, and the revolting article has given me quite a nausea."

John had eagerly swallowed every word that was uttered, not forgetting to wash them down with a draught of the sparkling beverage which had often dazzled his eyes on his master's table, without deigning to gratify his watering lips, and the delightful vapours of which were now generously elevating his brain.

"Who is that chap?" hickuped the valet, trying to steady himself, and jerking his finger over his shoulder in the direction of the first speaker. But, meeting an astonished stare, he corrected himself, by adding, "Beg pardon, did not mean to say chap. Vulgar-expression, horrid, disgusting; makes me feel quite a nausea. Bah! the vulgarity of those Irish boors have quite upset my vocabulary. No offence. There's no country in the world like this green isle; never was so happy in any other. Genial companions, generous hearts, splendid scenery, shady walks, mossy groves, and moonlit seas, as Milton says, 'poa my honour. I do emphatically swear, there is no country in the world so delightful; but please to acquaint me with that gentleman's name."

"Tottenham," said the other, "Lieutenant Tottenham; and if ever you feel lonely and would like a pleasant party, I dare say his mother will have great pleasure—" Here the gentleman, who had been viewing John through an eye-glass, as if he were a species of some wild beast, snatched away, while adding, "great pleasure in seeing her footman kick you from the door."

"Waiter, more champagne," cried the valet, not caring to hear the latter part of this polite speech. "Upon my life, this fizz is not so bad. Waiter, more cigars. Lieut. Tottenham, your very good health. Haw!"

"Tottenham, if you please," corrected the other.

"Well, Lieutenant Tottenham; the pleasure of another glass with you. Need not fear—no headache in this; and—as you were saying, you reside in—"

"Harcourt Street," said the Lieutenant, amused at the liberality of his companion, which made amends for his vulgarity.

"I knew some parties there. Your number is 27, I presume?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"Oh! for no reason in life—but you were speaking about your mother's sempstress. Can you tell me the address of that lady?"

"You are a most impertinent scoundrel!" returned the gentleman, flinging the champagne from his glass, and glaring at the valet in anger.

"I mean no offence—pray be seated—here,

waiter, some of your best provisions—that is, bring here the most costly supper you have. Your master's a —— fine fellow, and can provide handsomely for these gentlemen and myself.”

John Gorman took out his tablet, and wrote, “Mrs. Werter, sempstress, Harcourt Street.—For Master.”

This was, no doubt, a wise precaution—for in less than ten minutes after it had been taken, the valet was incapable of remembering that such people as Mrs. Werter or Fitzroy were in existence.

CHAPTER XIII.

GORMAN ON THE STAGE.

"If I understand thee I am a villain;
What I dost thou speak in parables to thy friend?"
THE MERRY DEVIL OF EDMONTON.

MR. FITZROY, as he had foretold, felt quite recovered before the evening was over, and sauntered out for a lounge through Gloucester Place, and many other streets and places beginning their names with a capital G., not forgetting the sausage shop; but as yet he heard no further tidings of the Werters. He then returned to his hotel, there to wait John's appearance, with considerable impatience.

Ten, eleven, twelve o'clock struck, but brought no valet with it. One, two, three, still he was absent; and until the second chime of four sent its peal through the silent streets, the usurer watched and waited in vain. Then a stealthy

footstep made its way to the apartment assigned to John, and opening the door quickly, Fitzroy pounced upon the truant like a vulture upon its prey, dragging him along the dark corridor and into the well lighted sitting room; the usurer stood aghast in contemplation of the drunken wretch before him.

"Here we are at last, old boy," hickuped John, drawing a chair to the table, and resting his elbows upon it, while he called, in a dignified voice, "here, waiter, more champagne—faith, and right good stuff it is too. Thanks, my friend; very kind of you to usher me into this comfortable apartment. Missed the exact way to my chambers. Oh! no apologies, my boy. I can put up with this accommodation for awhile."

"Villain!" roared Fitzroy, shaking his servant roughly; "is this the interest of my money; is it thus you have put to account my liberal supply of gold, spending it upon the gluttonous craving of your own filthy nature, and blinding me with empty promises of success?"

"Patience, sweet cherub," remonstrated John, stroking his master's chin affectionately, "then

fair narcissus of the vale—Lucretia Borgia of any Norman soul, or Don Pasquale of *Der Freischütz* dreams, do have some more fizz. Well, as I was saying, her ladyship, Mrs. De Burg, left this world against her will, and Mrs. Werter became the heiress of his satanic majesty's property, who lives in Harcourt Street, and will be delighted to entertain every puppy dog who wishes to make her acquaintance. Fine cigar this, isn't it, Lieutenant Totumteetum. Happy hearts in this old Ireland after all."

"You drunken fool," cried Fitzroy, endeavouring not to allow his passion to get the better of his gentlemanly exterior; but it was in vain, for he next roared, "Double dyed hypocrite, what mean you by mentioning Harcourt Street, the devil, and Mrs. Werter in one breath?"

"Easy, dear," lisped Gorman, stroking his hand along the black trousers that had so lately replaced the shorter garments of his nether man. "Easy, my dear, for your temper is so highly wrought that it quite disorganizes a gentleman, born in palace and in garret bred, as the poet says. You see I know Longfellow by heart, and

can imitate Patti to perfection—Sol, La, Fa, Si—sweet note that, is it not Lieutenant Totum.”

John poked his master's ribs as he finished off with a grand fantasia, which died in an unearthly cadence, produced by a heavy fall, as Fitzroy pushed him fiercely aside and quitted the room in high dudgeon.

Next morning John found himself stretched upon the floor of his master's sitting-room, and divining that his hypocrisy must have been by some means discovered—how, he had not the most distant recollection—determined to make the best of it by seeking his presence in contrition; but feeling very uncomfortable and horribly nervous after his morning's bath, he sought his never-failing remedy. When he had fraternized for an hour with the contents of the brandy bottle, he felt quite as happy as he had done the previous night, and courageous enough to face a hundred employers.

Gorman, accustomed to be summoned every morning to assist in his master's toilet, had his wits sufficiently clear to wait for the usual signal, but no bell rang, and the valet would wait no longer.

"Well," said Fitzroy, in a clear and measured voice, "what brings you hither, drunken sot as you are; it is little wonder that you shiver and pale before me, dishonest villain that I have found you, wasting the gold upon your vile passions that you professed to serve me with, get you gone, knave, and come no more before me."

"Stay, sir," replied the valet, trying hard to keep his feet, "your wrath is cutting and your calumny severe—I am no knave, but an honourable man, who, if he overstepped the bounds of prudence, did it to serve his master." And he bowed and retired towards the door in the best approved stage fashion when he delivered this speech.

Edmond Fitzroy, regretting having been betrayed into a passion on the previous evening, for it was against his principle to give way to unseemly temper, said quietly—

"What mean you by those high flown gestures? one would fancy that you had been playing a part in some pantomime, by which you learned to strut the boards of a third-rate theatre; no more fawning and scraping there, sir; for I say

that you are a dishonest knave and unworthy to serve me longer, therefore I discharge you from this hour."

"Not yet, fair Rodolph," replied the incorrigible valet, whose brain was now completely under the influence of his morning's potations, and he kept mimicking the characters that he had so ardently admired upon the stage the evening before—"not yet, for thou must keep me near thy sacred person, thou mighty sovereign of spangled princes—hist! you are in my power," here John frowned ferociously to imitate a brigand chief—"Yes, you are in my power, ha! start not, but give me gold, gold, and I will keep the secret locked within my breast: refuse, and all the world shall know that Duc D'Arcy is a villain."

An ejaculation of either fear or impatience escaped Fitzroy, and his face turned to an ashy paleness; then he remained in silent contemplation of the tipsy wretch swaggering about the room, until he continued, evidently personating the same character—

"Ha! you see I know more than you

anticipated, and it is now your turn to shiver and grow pale before me,—me, who am now your master; but give me gold and you are safe as with the dead.”

“Mad,” said Fitzroy. “Gorman, remember, if you can, whose presence you are in, and have done with those absurd antics.”

“Nay, your highness,” whispered the valet in a mysterious voice, “it were better left in silence, the crime I mean, for walls have ears, as the mountebank proclaims; and you would not wish others to learn the secret of a past life such as yours—it is safe with me, I swear it. Hark! hush, the queen is coming.”

Utterly lost in amazement, and slightly frightened for the sanity of his old servant, Mr. Fitzroy quitted the room in disdainful silence; when, however, he returned after an hour he found Gorman stretched comfortably on a lounge fast asleep. The clock was striking three, when the repentant valet again stood in his master's presence.

“Gorman,” began Fitzroy seriously, “you have been in my service for years, and have been

faithful in discharging every duty until now. If you fancy that you have wormed yourself into any secret of mine you are mistaken, as I have committed no action in my life that need be hidden from the world ; but I suppose it was the ravings of your drunken folly. Now listen to me—as I said, you have been faithful until now——.”

“Forgive me, sir,” interrupted the trembling servant, “for as you say it was my mad ravings ; in plain terms, sir, I was drunk.”

“Yes, and it will be so to the end of the chapter. Now, I have a proposition to make—particularly as I have learned that your tastes are of a more extravagant nature than your wages allow you to gratify.”

Again the gentleman was interrupted, this time by fervent protestations and promises of amendment.

“I shall increase your payment, on condition that you give up this vile habit and continue in my service.”

John bowed low, more to hide his surprise than in acknowledgment of this generosity—was he beginning to think that an hireling’s cunning had defeated a villain’s wisdom.

"It shall be the effort of my life to deserve your kindness," said John. Still mystified, he took out his note-book and read, "Mrs. Werter, sempstress, Harcourt Street, for master."

"What is this" cried Fitzroy, forgetting everything else in the sudden interest he felt in the purport of those few words.

"You see, sir, that I was not quite so forgetful of my duty as you thought last evening; it was for the purpose of hearing something of Mrs. Werter that I drank so deeply, for by example others followed. And through its means I learned that she is engaged as a sempstress by a Mrs. Totham or Tottenham."

Here followed a lengthened explanation, and Mr. Fitzroy freely forgiving his renegade valet, dismissed him, and set about forming plans for the morrow.

"Stage tricks are worth the study, after all," thought the valet, "and can be successfully introduced even into a private drama. What could I have said? I remember nothing clearly. Oh! fools, fools; this wise world is full of you."

"Gone at last," muttered Fitzroy, as the door

closed upon his servant. "Oh! the agony I have endured in that man's presence for the last half hour; for at first I did not mind his drunken foolery—but I since saw something in his manner which makes me believe that half those ravings were the real feelings he possessed towards me. Could they have been a covert warning—he, my master; he, who is the creature of my will, to wind his coils about my heart. But no, this shall not be—he shall die first. Bah! am I, who has staked so much upon a woman's caprice, to stay my hand at this?" He paced the apartment with a strange look in his glistening eyes, those black and powerful orbs. How Gorman would have shrunk from the baneful fire that shot from them at that moment.

"And Florence," he continued—"is my triumph come at last, or is it still uncertain?—a sempstress. Oh! the humbled pride of Colonel Werter's wife—proud beauty. I shall feel no pity now. Once within my power, hell's legions shall not rend you from me; demons have sealed the contract of my just revenge. I have sworn it, and eternity shall witness its fulfilment. What

else have I to live for. I shall keep my vow whatever should be the sacrifice. Florence Welter, I shall keep my vow, it is the destiny of both."

Still with an insane look in his restless eyes, Mr. Fitzroy clenched his hands until the nails cut into the white palms; a hectic flush was on his cheeks, and his whole appearance was terrible to behold; no one could doubt that he would waver in his purpose, yet it was hard to define what that purpose really was. The days of chivalry and romance are passed away, and he could not carry Florence off against her will—did he premeditate a secret murder? Time will reveal.

CHAPTER XIV.

RENEWAL OF OLD TIES.

"How still is the smile that no cloud can o'ercast,
And a heart and a hand all thy own to the last."

MOORE.

ELEANOR FAIRFIELD, in the hunting lodge of Lincondoon, was revising some pretext in her mind for an introduction to Major Somers, when Marian, more radiant than ever, entered the chamber.

"Please, madam, master's compliments, and will you and your brother honour the breakfast table with your presence this morning?"

"How came he to learn that we were here?"

"Father told him, of course; he requests that you will come down. So here is a brooch, cuffs and collar, then this scarlet ribbon for your hair."

"My hair is grey—I could not wear so gay a colour."

"Oh! madam,—but it is so rippling, so silky, so abundant, that I fancy you could not have looked more lovely when it was altogether black; see, here is a lock like a raven's wing, with no white thread to mar its beauty. Pray let it fall down thus—there now is a graceful curl, and you look very lovely—sadly beautiful, I think."

Ella had not heard a word of the rustic maiden's chatter, and had allowed herself to be drawn to the door quite unconsciously, then she drew back and clung to her companion.

"I cannot find courage to face those strangers," she said. "Leave me, Marian, for yours is a kind heart, and can pity one who is unhappy; leave me in mercy, but for a moment, that I may nerve my heart for what is coming."

The girl, with a glance of compassion, did as she was requested, but returned in a few minutes with a card, which she presented in silence. Ella took it and read—"The compliments of Sir Gordon Travers." She could read no farther. Other words were traced in pencil—a request that the lady who favoured his hunting lodge last evening should do him the pleasure of appearing

in the breakfast parlour; but the polite request was lost by the overpowering emotion called forth by that name.

"Sir Gordon Travers," she repeated, with her eyes still riveted on the card, as though she were unable to realize the full meaning of the sound.

"Sir Gordon Travers is the master," said Marian, at a loss to account for the strangeness of her companion's manner.

"And my more than father—I knew it. I knew it when you told me that Lincondoon was Cappa House."

Ella spoke excitedly; running from one memory to another, until pale and exhausted, she sank upon a seat weeping so hysterically, that the wondering girl became terrified, and would have summoned assistance, but that her hand was caught as it reached the bell.

"I shall be better soon," pleaded Ella, "do not, I entreat. Oh! this meeting. My dear, dear uncle."

A light suddenly burst upon Marian's brain, and scarcely less agitated now than Mrs. Fairfield, she leant over her chair and murmured, "he has

so long regretted you—he will be so glad to see you, do you believe it.”

Before Mrs. Fairfield could reply, Sir Gordon’s voice sounded in the passage. She started at the well-nigh forgotten, but now familiar tones, and trembled more violently than before.

A moment longer, and Marian’s father, after the ceremony of three respectful knocks, partially entered the room, and seeing the lady weeping in his daughter’s arms, looked from one to the other in blank amazement.

“Father—it is Miss Eleanor,” whispered Marian, “go and prepare master for this meeting.”

The man went down stairs without uttering a word, and stood before the Baronet in the breakfast parlour, stammering and stammering at such a rate as to excite the merriment of all present; but at last he made them understand that the stranger to whom they had given shelter was a person of great importance; after which he became so mysterious that his master grew impatient.

“It is some one you know, sir, very, very well,” added the man, turning aside and addressing his master in a low voice, “some one whom you

would rather look upon than the queen of the fairy aisles ; in fact, sir, it is the lady of all others you would most like to see."

" Good heaven, what is the man driving at," exclaimed Sir Gordon. " Do you play with me as one plays with a trout on a hook ? speak out, man, who is the lady ? if a lady she be at all. There is but one in the world I would give this old pipe here for a look at, and that is my wife—unless, indeed—unless, indeed—man, speak out, speak for your life, is that lady Miss, Miss—"

" Miss Eleanor, sir," added the man, supplying the name the other could not bring himself to pronounce.

Sir Gordon walked to the window in silence, and the gentlemen present saw the hardy huntsman tremble from head to foot, but not one intruded upon his emotion.

" What shall I do ?" asked Mrs. Fairfield of Marian, " how can I nerve myself for this. Oh ! will he ever forgive me ? Will he ever look upon this wretched face again ? I must be strong. Let me go to the window, for I suffocate."

The air seemed to revive her, for the colour

returned faintly to her cheeks. Suddenly she grasped the girl's hand and pointed silently to the garden. Marian looked in the direction, and saw Sir Gordon, bare headed and pale, leaning heavily on the arm of his nephew, George Travers, Ella's former affianced husband. After a little they turned into the house, and Ella heard the sound of footsteps approaching the stairs. Nearer, nearer they came, and paused at the door, which flew open. She sprang from her companion's side and fell upon her uncle's breast, unconscious alike of joy or sorrow.

“It is my Ella, my little raven, back in the old place once more,” he faltered. Long and tenderly he held the dear head upon his breast, that heaved and struggled with the contending emotion of his manly heart; then he lifted her to a couch, and watched anxiously for her recovery. “Ah!” he said, looking on the pallid face before him, “how sadly she is changed. I cannot now call her my bright young raven as I used to do. Youth is no longer here, although life is only in its spring. But it will never again renew the verdure of this stricken heart. Poor girl! poor

Nelly! What does it all mean? Out in the rain at the dead of night, and only escorted by—by whom, Marian did you say?"

"Her brother, sir," returned the girl.

"Her brother," he continued, more sadly. "Ah! poor Frederick; and how did they meet? Where is her husband? What have they done to change her thus? See those silver threads. Oh! how old she has grown in those short years. Marian, I am so thankful to recover my lost treasure that—that I weep; and you must take me for a weak old fool; but I have held her a baby in my arms, Marian, and she is the same to me as if she were born my own child. See, she revives. Go, good girl, and leave us alone together."

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE GRAVE YARD.

"It must remain entire whilst life remains,
The monument of her and of my pains."

SAML. DANIEL.

AN hour passed away, and the hungry huntsmen were becoming rather impatient for their breakfast, when Sir Gordon and the two strangers of the previous night entered the parlour, with traces of emotion visible on each face. But fearing to check the mirth of his guests, the host assumed a cheerfulness he was far from feeling, for happy as he was in regaining his long lost niece, he could not but be affected by the sad history of both her and Frederick, of which they had made him partially acquainted.

After presenting Mrs. Fairfield to all present, he said, in a pleasant tone—

"Here is some venison of a most savoury

odour, and if I might judge from all your countenances, gentlemen, you intend doing it ample justice. What is this? A roast chicken, piping hot, most likely the bandy-legged fellow I saw picking corn in the poultry yard an hour ago; and this? Kidneys as brown as berries, and chops done to a turn."

"Mr. Travers has gone over to Lincondoon," said Major Somers.

This short but explanatory sentence sent the blood quickly to Ella's face. He who was once her betrothed husband, did not wish, for her sake, to meet her in the presence of strangers, and had gone to acquaint her aunt of what had taken place.

Soon after breakfast the sound of the hunter's horn, blending with the joyous bark of dogs, was echoed merrily from the distant hills, but Sir Gordon heard the tempting strains without regret as he stood beside Ella and Frederick at the cottage door.

"Well, Marian," he said, addressing the delighted girl, who had lingered near them. "you see, my raven at last found a wing to fly back to

her old nest again. So feather her with your best plumes, which shall be returned with interest before your wedding day, for it is eleven o'clock, and I suppose your father is preparing his one-horse chaise, which is the speediest means we can procure for conveying Mrs. Fairfield home. I told him to ride to the meet before evening, and tell the gentlemen that instead of dining here as we intended, I shall expect them at Lincondoon, where they can all find beds. Now take Mrs. Fairfield and equip her for the road. Bless the girl, how pale she grows, as though the old wife's resentment could have lived through all those weary years. I tell you, Ella, that if you do not use a little despatch she will be here herself before you set out."

Still Mrs. Fairfield, moving closely to her brother, seemed to hesitate in doing what her uncle requested.

"Leave us, my sister," whispered Frederick; "I must not go to Lincondoon, as I see you already guess. Go, dearest, and fear nothing on my account, for now that you are safe, now that you have found a home, for his sake, who is still

so dear to you, I will be guarded of my own welfare."

"Hey-day!" cried the Baronet; "what is all this gibbering about? What is the matter now, Nelly? You weep—"

"'Tis nothing, sir," she replied, endeavouring to curb her agitation; "or at least it is only because Frederick has been so ill, so very ill, and he looks so unusually pale this morning that I am nervous I believe, and perhaps easily frightened. Good Marian, I shall join you presently in your bedchamber."

Sir Gordon took the arm of his niece, and led her from the cottage into the open field, Norcott slowly following.

"There is something deeper in your manner than your words imply, my child," he said, solemnly. "Ah! Nell, be cautious how you deceive the old man again; but there, I did not mean to reproach you. Still it is better to clear your bosom of all your troubles at once, and if there be a secret, trust it to the heart you learned to lean upon in childhood. Mine, Ella, mine."

"Oh! Fred," she exclaimed, in a subdued voice.

that her brother alone could hear, "tell him all ; he will save you, only tell him all."

"And of him—your husband—also," muttered Frederick, "for one is so interwoven with the other that they can never separate."

"Not that—not that. Oh ! heaven pity us."

"My children," said the Baronet, "this mystery affects me with sorrow and distrust. If there be aught you cannot confide to me, forbear in mercy now to show too plainly the little affection I am held in."

"Uncle Travers," replied Frederick, "Ella is innocent of everything except her runaway marriage ; that one fatal act of ungrateful disobedience to you and to her who has been towards us both as one of the best of mothers. Ella loves you still, indeed she has never ceased to do so. She is good and innocent ; I am—what you will—perhaps not fit company for the honest men at Lincondon. Take her with you, sir, shelter her, give her your heart and home again. I must go my own way ; I cannot look upon my aunt's face again. I have brought her grief enough already. I will go to a far-off country, and by honest labour seek to redeem the past, and if an

exile's grave be mine I will thank heaven that it was not at the foot of the gallows tree."

"Why what mad tantrum is the lad in now?" cried Sir Gordon in astonishment, looking at the death-like features of his nephew. "Come, Fred, come; you have been a little wild, I know, but never bad—bad! Why a kinder hearted lad the sun never shone upon. Be true to yourself, although you have been unfortunate, and have done some foolish deeds in your life, which will be forgotten as easily as they are forgiven. What matters now that the demon—hem—rascal Fitzroy, who befriended you, turned out to be the villain Fairfield, and that you fled from Lilymount, and your only means of livelihood is gone, am not I here beside you, and when did I ever fail in my duty to my dead sister's children? It is well that you did run away so soon from Lilymount, else ere this your hands might have been red with that craven's blood; but good heaven, lad, what has come over you? Why you are trembling like an aspen."

"He has been so ill, uncle," pleaded Ella, "and has over-taxed his strength."

"Well, it is all the better reason for hurrying

to Lincondoon, where he shall be looked after with proper care and affection. When he is strong again all these flimsy tremours will vanish like a cloud."

Frederick smiled sadly as he murmured—

"Ah! sir, when self-respect is gone, happiness flies with it; but I weary you, uncle. No, I will not set foot in Lincondoon; yet if you will befriend me, give me the means of going to a foreign land, where perhaps by turning my thoughts to better and nobler things than have hitherto fallen to my lot, I might in time become if not a good, at least a useful man. Ella will tell you that is the best and safest course to adopt, bitter as it is to part."

"It is so, uncle," replied Mrs. Fairfield, weeping; "let him go, in heaven's name, for it is the wisest, the only plan to pursue. Alas! that it should be so."

"Is the lad in debt that he has to fly the country; if so I will make good whatever it may be, or if this be a freak of a naturally roving disposition, why, as you say, Nelly, in heaven's name then let him go. But time enough, lad;

come over to Lincondoon before we talk more about it, and see your old aunt, who is burning to embrace you both. If you do not wish to come in contact with those merry huntsmen, why you can keep to yourself and welcome. So run off now, my girl, and get dressed while we seek our horses."

Taking Norcott forcibly by the arm Sir Gordon Travers dragged rather than led him towards the stables.

"Here is Lord Bambury's hunter, Fred," he said, "which you can mount; he is a spirited fellow, but not much like his master in that respect, who is as henpecked an individual as was ever tied to woman's apron string. My lord was to have been one of our party yesterday; but my lady took him for an airing in her carriage instead. Hey Gad, here is a treasure, and a compact one too."

"A treasure," repeated Frederick; "is it that great whip, sir? Why one would fancy it was made for lashing cattle to a fair."

"Nevertheless, it is a fine whip," returned the Baronet, "a strong whip; hearken to its ring.

Hey Gad, it is a splendid whip, and one that would fly off Fitzroy's shoulders with a twang that would be music to my heart. Gad I would give a thousand or two to let him feel the length and breadth of it this minute. But it will keep, Fred, it will keep."

Sir Gordon leaped into his saddle as he spoke, and with a curse partially smothered between his clenched teeth, cantered past the servant, who, after fastening the last trace of the harness, was using his best efforts to make an out-of-date vehicle look somewhat in accordance with fashion by rubbing its wheels and scrubbing its weather-beaten sides until it creaked and grumbled at such a rate that he feared it would refuse to do the amiable by bearing even the slight weight of Sir Gordon's niece to Lincendoon.

"If the master would let us take the short cut by the cross roads," muttered the man to himself, "there might be some good got out of the Shandradan, as he calls it; but to go the round he intends and all to avoid the old churchyard, as if he expected to see his grandfather's ghost or some hobgoblin dancing upon the tombstones,

I am sure it won't stand it. But I suppose he is the best judge of his own actions ; he has always good reason at the bottom of his nonsense, and —there he goes as brisk as a bee, and looking ten years younger for the meeting with his daughter, as one might call her, for she was always like one to him I understand, and faith, that's a handsome, fine chap is Mr. Norcott, and a pleasant journey to them say I."

"So you left her child in an unmarked grave, Fred," said the Baronet, sorrowfully. "Oh ; to think that Nelly's babe should have died so. Gad, sir, it makes the old blood leap vigorously in my veins to think of what she has suffered from that traitor, Fairfield. But for you, lad, but for you she would never more have found her old home, she would not have wanted it poor girl, for a pauper's grave would have long since been her portion ; but you kept her out of it. God bless you for that, Fred."

He sank his spurs deep in his horse's flanks as he spoke, and the animal sprang forward in a fierce gallop, followed swiftly by Frederick.

"Ride faster, man," called back Sir Gordon ;

“mend your pace until we get beyond her sight, for there she is watching out of Marian’s window. Hasten, and we shall be back before the old chaise is ready.”

“But whither, sir, whither are you going?” asked Frederick.

“To the churchyard, lad,” was the quick reply, as again the spurs were used, as though the rider was angry; and with an impatient snort the animal darted forward at a terrible pace; but this time Frederick had overtaken his uncle, and both pressed on in silence for a little.

“It is only a stone’s throw across this path,” said the Baronet; “yonder is the outskirt of Lincondon forest, to the left of which lies the churchyard.”

Frederick recognised what the Baronet described, and found that they had wandered a long way through the fields on the previous evening, and that making now for the spot indicated, although in a circuitous line, it was not quarter the distance he had found it then; for after a quarter of an hour’s rapid riding their horses were reined up, heated and panting at the gap in the wall through

which Frederick had assisted his sister only a few hours before, while her dead child was lying upon his bosom.

There was no difficulty in regaining the little mound where Hatty lay, and the strong men stood in silent contemplation of the lonely spot, for the emotion busy at the hearts of each conquered all utterance, and if either had made a sound it should have been in tears; both fought bravely with what men call weakness, but which women recognize as strength, until at last Sir Gordon beckoned to the workmen, who were busy at some masonry a few paces from them, and to whom he was well known.

“Reid,” said Sir Gordon, “bring hither your spade and shovel.” The man obeyed, and the Baronet lifted each sod without allowing the other to render any assistance, until he came to a piece of garment, then he cast aside the implement, and brushing with his fingers the clay from the strange shroud, he reverently lifted the little form from its grave; death had done no harm as yet to the young beauty of that innocent face, and the child lay upon the old man’s bosom like

a sleeping cherub; the crisp black curls were still clustering round the white forehead, and the pale lips that so short a time before had cried so piteously in pain, were now wreathed in a quiet smile of peacefulness.

The masons looked on in mute astonishment, but were too respectfully attached to their benefactor to intrude upon a sorrow that they knew nothing of, so one by one they fell back from the grave, and retiring to the furthest corner of the churchyard, resumed their work.

Norcott pressed his lips to the brow of her whom he had cherished from infancy, and at last gave way to a passion of uncontrollable grief, while the Baronet had recourse to his handkerchief, and coughed huskily before he could speak.

"You are a good lad, Frederick; a brave lad, and I honour you for this. Glad, I weep myself, I think; poor Nell, this is all she had to love on earth; this lovely child, who lies so white and still in my arms now, this fragile bit of dust, this human worm. Alas! for us poor beings who have no fitter idols for our worship."

"A good lad, a brave lad indeed," repeated Frederick, as though he had not heard his relative speak farther. "Oh! that this one agony were gone; this one torture were over. Oh! thou much offended God, have mercy upon me, for my suffering is greater than I can bear!" He clenched his hand across his forehead, and sobs shook his frame with terrible intensity.

"Frederick, be a man," said Sir Gordon, huskily; "what does this anguish mean? are your heartstrings so woven into hers, your sister's child, that her loss afflicts you thus?"

"No," cried Frederick, wildly tossing his arms, "it is not that, it is not that that grieves me so. Oh! if these tears were turned to blood, and each one wrung from the agony of my heart, I could not tell you half its tortures. No, no, no, I am neither good nor brave; I had no virtue to resist temptation. I had no courage to crush Edmond Fairfield beneath my heel as a viper; when he pitied my poverty on London Bridge, where I fled from the woe of seeing that child, that little Hatty starve with the mother who looked to me for help. No, I am not a good man, I am a devil!"

He drew himself up to his fullest height, and looked for a moment the thing he called himself, but seeing the kind eyes of the old man bent upon him with tender compassion, he pressed the aged hand within his own, and his whole manner changed as he resumed, "Pardon this outbreak, sir; I am excited, my head burns, and I am very ill."

"Yes," returned the Baronet; "I see you are, for your hands are like burning coals, your lips like fire, and your looks are full of fever; calm yourself, for I am waiting until you are able to accompany me to the clergyman of the parish, who lives in the brick house across the road below."

"The clergyman of the parish," repeated his nephew; "I cannot go, sir, leave me to rest here until you return."

"You will be better by the time we have reached his dwelling," said the other, gazing in pity upon the shivering form of Frederick, who had now turned to an ashy paleness. "Come lad, and the sooner you are quiet in bed the better."

“To meet a stranger! no, uncle; I cannot go with you; leave me here to wait for your return.” But his companion, dreading to leave him alone, seated himself quietly beside the little corpse which had been laid for a moment upon the mound beside them.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOME AT LAST.

"Both these lost names,
I o restore thee back."

HERWOOD.

RECALLING one of the mason's, and bidding him remain to keep watch beside the dead. Sir Gordon Travers passed his hand through Mr. Norcott's arm and led him slowly from the churchyard.

The Rev. B. Keat did not keep them long waiting, for he was well acquainted with one of his visitors, who so frequently headed the charity list with a hundred pound cheque on condition that it should be anonymous. The minister welcomed the gentlemen cordially, and the instinct of a warm heart soon discovered an unusual dejection of manner in his friend; naturally kind, he was alarmed for one esteemed

so highly as the Baronet, who perceiving the distress on his account, said quickly—

“It is a young soul that has winged its flight on high, dear sir; so entertain no further fears for me, but her death was peculiar, as it occurred on the highway yonder!”

“And my house in sight!” returned the clergyman.

“Even so, but I cannot now enter into the particulars, which you can hear to-morrow from her mother’s lips, my poor niece Eleanor Fairfield!”

“Her mother, your niece, and to meet with such a death; this is terrible news indeed, sir.”

“It shall be explained anon, for now I want your assistance in procuring a coffin, and officiating in the burial service with as little delay as possible. I must trust all to you, even to the erecting of a marble tomb, for which you can draw upon my banker; the age, name, &c., I shall send you this evening. Can you do this for me!”

“Yes, certainly,” answered the other, glancing at the silent figure of Frederick, who stood at the

window as though he had no interest in what was going forward. "Yes, certainly, all shall be done as you desire; but first I must see the churchwardens, whose enquiries must be satisfied—where am I to find the body if you do not remain with me now?"

"In the churchyard, under the care of Robert Reid; and while you are making preparations I shall send a full written statement of the sad affair."

After some further explanations to the clergyman, the gentlemen left the house together, and parted on the road in different directions—Mr. Keat to follow the instructions of his friend, and the others to return to the hunting lodge.

The vehicle was waiting at the door when they arrived, and Mrs. Fairfield welcomed her uncle with a smile.

"Ready and waiting," he said, in a cheerful voice. "Hey Gad! and looking smart, too, in that bonny silk. Maid Marian's very best gown, I swear, and just a fit—a little too long, perhaps, but gracefully so. Oh! yes, I have seen you make numerous attempts to speak, Miss Nell,

which my gibbering has prevented; but I know you want to learn why we have kept you waiting. Well, my dear, obeying the instinct of a true sportsman, I rode in the direction of the hounds and horn, the glad notes of which proved too strong a temptation for my hunting boots to resist, for you may perceive they are mounted and ready for the chase: it is all very wrong, I know, but your eyes are assuring me already of forgiveness, and Marian is laughing because I forgot to change my pumps."

Sir Gordon followed his niece into the tumble-down carriage, leaving Frederick to accompany them on Lord Branbury's hunter; then all took a gracious leave of Marian Currie, after which the driver cracked the whip which had been the object of the Baronet's admiration, and drove off.

As they went along, Ella believed she was re-traversing the route of the previous evening, and looked frequently from the broken window in quest of the churchyard, but an exclamation from her uncle at length recalled her.

"Hey Gad!" he cried, "there are the red coats—look this side, Nelly, through the cluster

of trees near the hill. Gad! a great sight for a sportsman this fine day: I wonder if Reynard is yet brought to bay. Hark! I hear their tally-ho, even above the grumbling of this most discontented machine. Ha! there they go."

"It is a pretty sight, indeed, sir—but are we near Lincondoon?"

"Half-an-hour more, my dear; you are impatient to be clasped in the arms of her who would be a mother if she could, poor soul. Clever lad is George to think of preparing her for this surprise."

"It will be a joyful meeting for me," said Ella; "but oh! do not think me ungrateful if I cannot display that joy at present, for the wound of Hatty's loss is so fresh upon my heart, that until it heals a little I cannot either appear cheerful or content—beside, will my aunt quite forgive me, think you?"

"That she will, my dear, and bide your own time for gaiety; we understand you well enough to know that selfishness could never be a part of your nature. It is right that you should feel the grief of a parent for an only child's death, and

we will not blame you for it ; only look forward cheerfully to the future, which will make us all happy. And I know that the idea of contributing to the felicity of others, always created a world of pleasure for the Nelly of our former days ; therefore she cannot fail to feel the same now. Look here, and you can get a transient view of Lincondoon. Yonder are its chimney tops, and when we pass over that bridge, you can see the great, lonely house, which it will be Ella's duty to enliven."

"A splendid site, sir," remarked Norcott, bending from his horse ; "a noble structure—the demesne, with its woods and river, seems a fertile paradise from this ;—and that deer park yonder, to whom does it belong ?"

"It is part of the Lincondoon property, and one which I purchased five years back." Sir Gordon paused, while looking dreamily at the spirited animal that cantered beside him ; then added, "It was then we—aunt and I—agreed to change the name from Cappa House to Lincondoon ; there is a Scotch sound about it, but none the worst for that, Fred ; twelve months in

foreign lands after—after Ella's marriage was quite enough for the wife and I, who were glad to get back to the old country again. That preserve will afford you much amusement, if you are fond of coursing; a little to the left of the plesance you will have ample opportunity of displaying your skill as a marksman, which, be it ever so well practised, I will back George against."

"My cousin," answered Frederick, "is not only an accomplished gentleman, but a brave and good one—you have reason to be proud of him, sir."

"Yes," returned the Baronet. "I have reason to be proud of one who is worth his weight in gold. I mean, Fred, that he is one, who possessing an ample fortune, is proof against temptation. No, I do not mean that, but—but perhaps it is because he is fortunate enough to possess one true friend, somewhat about his own age, who would keep a regiment of dragoons from mischief, if example could do so."

"And who is this friend?" asked Mrs. Fairfield.

"Major Somers," replied Sir Gordon; then

sang with a cheerfulness that was more assumed than felt, "for he's a right good fellow, for he's a right good fellow."

Sir Gordon broke off suddenly on perceiving the increasing pallor of his niece's face, and listened to her next remark with something like terror, blended with surprise in his honest face.

"I must see Major Somers," she said, "dear uncle. I cannot rest to-night until I see this gentleman;—speak with him I must."

"Must. Why, what can Jackey, that is my Jackdaw—you, Nelly, my dear—want with the red coat?" asked Sir Gordon.

"To clear the character of a virtuous woman, sir, and prove to him the error of being too credulous. He has believed a vicious calumny that reached him—as the snake reaches its intended victim, or worse, by mystery."

"Eleanor, my child, it is not your name that they dared to traduce?"

"No; but one of the loveliest and best of human beings—a young widow, helpless in her unprotected position—has been slandered by—a person who has been long infatuated by either

her beauty, his own senseless but not the less passionate revenge, or both combined perhaps ;—one whom she has scorned, and who takes the petty vengeance of circulating vile epistles far and near—anonymous letters, accusing her of infamy, and one of which this Major Somers has received.”

“But who is this villain, this double coward, who could act thus?” cried Sir Gordon, indignantly.

“Ask me not. Oh! ask me not, for in this lies all my misery.”

The Baronet paused for a few moments in thoughtful silence, then said—

“You do not mean that he, that Edmond Fairfield—your husband—has done this deed.”

“Ah!” she answered; “it is but too true. He fled from me to haunt this beautiful woman, even when she was a wife, or rather, perhaps, to follow the phantom of his own imagination. He and I had not met for years, and when we did he spurned me.”

“Devils! fiends! and furies!” muttered Sir Gordon, striking his clenched hand furiously upon

the window sash. "And this beautiful traitress who has bewitched another woman's husband is—"

"Traitor!" broke in Ella. "Ah! sir; you do not know her, or you would not wrong her by that word. Good and virtuous, she despised the man who could insult the wife of Colonel Werter."

"Colonel Werter," repeated the Baronet. "Child, you astonish me: and this villain Edmond Fairfield dared to approach the woman whose fair name has been as a halo over her husband's home, whose goodness was the theme of every lip, and whose beauty shone in the society she adorned as its brightest ornament. I have seen her often, and heard of her womanly charities times without number. I have frequently met Colonel Werter at the hunt and races."

"I am glad of this; and you will help my interview with this credulous young man?"

"My dear, in this there must be some mistake, for Major Somers is not a person to believe anything derogatory to the honour of such a woman

as Mrs. Werter—besides, what has he to do with her?”

“He loves her, and that passion makes us all not only suspicious, but jealous where we should not be so.”

“With that I cannot coincide, for those who love most truly, trust most implicitly. Yes, I feel assured that you are wrong regarding Audley, who is betrothed to the cousin of an Irish peer, a fine girl, who follows the hounds like any man, and lashes the whip like the spirited woman she is; he is engaged to the Honourable Jane Alcott, who can bring mansions and estates to her bridegroom in dozens. But hey, Gad! what is this—a carriage and pair fully caparisoned, but it is on the wrong road. Hail him, Fred; it is aunt’s doings for Nelly.”

Mrs. Fairfield looked from the window at her uncle’s exclamation, and saw a splendid vehicle making towards them; the coachman drew up as he approached, and George Travers leaped on to the road.

This gentleman could not, perhaps, have been called strictly handsome, for his features were

natured manner imaginable. When the paroxysm had subsided, Ella tremulously asked for Lady Travers.

"She is in her boudoir, Miss Ella," replied the woman, "and here am I keeping you away, and knowing that my poor mistress is shivering and shaking and crying and sighing till she sees you ; come, deary, come."

With a heart almost oppressed by grateful affection, Mrs. Fairfield sought the presence of her who was the only mother she had ever known.

No eye save One was near to witness the meeting of those two loving hearts, or to register the free pardon of the one and the joyful gratitude of the other.

The greeting of Lady Travers to Frederick Norcott was scarcely less warm than that which was accorded to Mr, Fitzroy Fairfield's neglected wife.

CHAPTER XVII.

LINCONDOON.

"Now, though for her sake I'm crost."

WITHER.

"Oh! dearest aunt," were the first words uttered by Ella, as, holding Lady Travers at arm's length, she gazed upon the tear-stained face before her, "dearest aunt, to be restored to you and home seems a greater happiness than I can bear—my heart is bursting with it—it is like a delicious dream, from which each moment I dread to waken."

It was indeed too much happiness to be calmly borne by one who had endured the burden of her sorrow so uncomplainingly, for, sinking upon her relative's bosom, poor Ella wept hysterically.

"Think no more of the past, my girl," murmured her ladyship, "but let the future cheer

you with its promised happiness. Ah! Nell, our love can never change, and you are all the world to us."

A short time before the dinner hour Lady Travers re-entered Mrs. Fairfield's dressing-room, laden with sundry articles of apparel. "Now, my dear," she said, "here is a diamond spray for your hair, brooch, ear-rings, and bracelet *en suite*—then this velvet train looped up with—"

"What are all these for?" interrupted Mrs. Fairfield; "surely not for me, aunt; for you know I could not meet those strangers. Ah! no, not for me; I must not meet your guests to-night, not so soon after those heartburnings, and with the little grave in yonder church yard so newly made. No, aunt, take back the gems, they cannot be for me."

Feeling that it would be a mistaken kindness to urge her point, Lady Travers replied, "Then be it as you will, dear; but how to amuse yourself until I can escape thither? Books? yes, you were always fond of books, and here is Bulwer, Thackeray, and one or two other great authors willing to give you their company; so I,

must leave you now, most heartily envying your solitude."

Mrs. Fairfield took up a volume, it was one by Dickens, now the world's lost favourite, and whose works we regard as things too sacred to be lightly handled, henceforth to be read reverently, remembering only the grand mind that governed him, who was not only the poor man's friend, but the familiar household joy of nations.

Many faces bend over those volumes now—kindly, noble faces, full of regretful sorrow for the dead, and tears fell upon their leaves. A tribute of love to the memory of him whose loss was felt by every grade.

Lady Travers bustled from the room, and in a moment more came back again, leading by the hand a young girl, whom Ella instinctively guessed to be Rettie Somers.

"I could not resist the temptation of this introduction," said her ladyship, "for I met Miss Somers in the corridor, and as I know you will be the best of friends in two seconds, I brought her to you, particularly as she is uneasy about a letter she has just received from her brother,

informing her that he cannot return here from the hunt."

"She is most welcome," replied Mrs. Fairfield, warmly greeting the stranger, and smiling at her relative's original mode of introduction. "I trust it is not anything unpleasant that detained Major Somers."

"I grieve to say it is," answered Rettie. "You, Mrs. Fairfield, had scarcely left Sir Gordon's hunting lodge this morning when Audley received a letter which was brought him at the meet by one of our servants, informing him of my father's sudden illness. Lady Travers will not allow me to return home until morning; however, as Audley is a tender nurse, I need scarcely be so much alarmed; still, I wish her ladyship would allow me to fly away this moment from Lincondon."

"No, my dear, there is no necessity for that; if I thought there was I should accompany you myself this instant; but you know your father is subject to such attacks, and as your brother is by his side you may make yourself perfectly comfortable. Why what would George—"

She did not finish the allusion to her nephew, but the vivid blush that dyed the young girl's face was sufficient to fill up the blank.

Miss Somers and her brother had arrived at Lincondoon the previous day on a long-promised visit to her ladyship, a visit which Rettie was persuaded to pay by Mr. Somers, for, tender in every filial duty, she seldom left her home; but as Sir Gordon was a valued friend, the old gentleman insisted on his daughter going to Lincondoon.

Mrs. Fairfield, although regretting the cause of the Major's absence, was secretly rejoiced that he was not to be one of the party there that night, else she would have accused herself of but a lukewarm friendship in not at once entering into the cause of Mrs. Werter.

"Do you not reside near this?" asked Ella.

"About fifty miles distant," returned Rettie.

"Summerville," added Lady Travers, "is near your old residence, Ella; that is about three miles from Lilymount."

Mrs. Fairfield changed colour and remained silent, while Rettie continued.

"Then perhaps your niece knows Mrs. Werter, who lived in Woodbine Cottage, opposite Lily-mount, which was once her own home. But, Lady Travers, Mrs. Fairfield is ill. She is as pale as death."

Lady Travers rose in alarm, but Ella assured her that she need not take notice of a faintness to which, from its frequency, she was growing accustomed.

"Yes, I know Mrs. Werter," she said, "who is a lady as good as she is beautiful."

"She is so indeed," returned Miss Somers, with vehemence.

Lady Travers felt that it was a painful subject for her niece, knowing as she did that this same woman was unwittingly the cause of Mrs. Fairfield's unhappiness, and although unacquainted with the true reason of her agitation, she broke abruptly into a prologue from a book of plays that lay before her.

"I fear I have interrupted your reading," said Rettie, apologetically to Eleanor.

"Not so, since my aunt has placed those volumes at my disposal, and for my own time."

"Just listen to this," cried Lady Travers, now seizing upon "Pickwick." "Was there ever such drollery as this? I do declare, were I even in the very blackest of blues, this passage would cure me. Listen—"

But as her ladyship was settling herself in the fitting position for a reader, the door was flung wide open, and Sir Gordon unceremoniously made his appearance.

"Hey, a literary meeting," he cried. "Gad! it is as bad as the Ragged School Committee, and the sooner I make my exit again the better."

He looked from one to the other, while shrinking in feigned horror from the numerous volumes strewn about.

Sir Gordon had sought the presence of his niece, hoping that he might prevail on her to appear among his guests, but was as unsuccessful as her ladyship. The first dinner bell warned them that it was time to separate, and as they were leaving the room together Miss Somers took Mrs. Fairfield's hand, and smilingly said—

"I will wish you good-bye now, for I shall be far upon my journey before you wake to-morrow."

They then parted, mutually pleased at the introduction, and with each other.

“She loves my cousin,” thought Ella, as she listened to their retreating footsteps. “May she be worthy of him. Ah! George Travers, if yours was a nature that could descend to such, you well might smile at the misery my broken vows have brought upon myself. Had you loved me, had we loved one another, how different would I be now. Poor Hatty! yours is a happy lot, free from the turmoil of this changing world. How kind of uncle; but what difference makes a coffin, though it be lined with satin, or a grave, though covered by a marble tomb? I am childless, and that is the only memory of this wretched heart, yet not the only one, for another more bitter still is haunting me with a deeper agony. Frederick, my brother, what has he done to flee thus from Earl de Burg? Murder, and Edmond, too, connected with it. Murder! The word curdles every drop of blood in my veins; but how? Who has been the victim? Not him—not Colonel Werter. That thought is too horrible. No, no, no, if murder has been done it was for

gold, and he had no possession worth the crime. His wife! could it have been to gain her? No, there must have been a deeper motive than love or hatred; if Edmond's soul be steeped in the bloody deed. It was not he, not Colonel Werter, the husband of my only friend. Oh! great heaven, I shall go mad with doubt and horror."

Exhausted by the violence of her excitement, Ella flung herself upon the bed, and endeavoured to shut out every sound of life that rang through the building and into her lonely chamber.

Only a few minutes after the time appointed for dinner the huntsmen made their appearance in a formidable body; indeed, Lincondoon might have been more properly termed Liberty Hall, for each individual made himself as perfectly at home in the hospitable abode as if it were entirely his own, Frederick Norcott excepted, who, weak and ill, threw himself upon a couch in his dressing room, and remained motionless, regardless of the valet's frequent little coughs and sundry other efforts to arouse him to the all important business of the toilet. His perplexity was

amounting to a pitch of desperation, when the door opened and the Baronet entered, and signing the servant to withdraw, seated himself beside his nephew.

"Poor lad!" he thought, "there is a grief upon his mind with which he will not acquaint even me, although he knows that whatever it may be he has my entire sympathy."

"You look ill, Frederick," he said, aloud. "Had I not better obtain medical aid for you at once?"

"No, dear sir," replied Norcott, "although I know I do look ill. Some terrible crisis seems drawing near, a turn of fate, perhaps. Who knows but death is stretching out his gloomy hand, and that this pallor is the shadow of it. Yet what folly. Do I rave? Pardon me, sir, those thoughts, 'uncannie,' must be uncongenial to your warm nature. I shall help myself to a glass of this old Madeira, which the valet brought me an hour since by your special order. There, I shall be better presently. Now for a dress coat, if I am to meet those honest men at dinner."

"Here is one—your own," returned the Baronet,

at a loss to account for the incoherent manner of his nephew. "See, it has been kept with affectionate care, and you have grown no taller since it last was worn."

"No, but how much thinner, sir," remarked Frederick, adjusting the garment on his person. "Well, it matters little about the fit of a coat if the heart that beats beneath it be an honest one. A clear conscience is its best lining, and—but pardon me again, uncle, for I believe my head is a little crazed; not with the wine, however, for that time has passed; but I feel strange, strange, and very miserable."

He threw himself passionately on the sofa as he finished, and Sir Gordon was retiring to send for a physician, when he again leaped to his feet and caught his hand.

"Stay," he cried bitterly, "for no doctor shall come near me. I am not ill, only excited. It is little wonder, after all that has occurred since last night. Ella is the same. Come, let us join the other gentleman, and you shall see me calm enough presently."

A dinner party at Lincondon always passed

off with more sociality than a similar party in any other house ; yet this evening a little restraint and formality was visible, owing, perhaps, to an unusual absence of mind being detected in the host, who watched Mr. Norcott as furtively as if he expected to see him plunge his knife into the bosom of the person seated next him. However, Frederick conducted himself as a rational gentleman, except that the several removes disappeared before him almost untasted. It was a relief to all when the ladies retired to the drawing-room, leaving the gentlemen to enjoy their wine alone. Yet, to their honour be it spoken, they did not long indulge in that barbarous custom, for most of the jovial huntsmen, preferring bright smiles to grape juice, delayed not to follow the ladies. Frederick, however, again sought his own apartment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHRISTMAS EVE AT MISS RAYMOND'S.

"This little star is furnished with good spirits."

CORY'S DANTE.

LITTLE dreaming that she was an object of interest to many loving hearts, Florence Werter struggled on from day to day, until amid the bleak winds of an unusually severe winter, Christmas Eve, with all its associations of grief and pleasure, was ushered in upon her.

To the widow it was a time of the saddest memories. The sacred reminiscences of home, love, and trusting affection, started before her like so many bright vistas, through which she should never again traverse. And whatever might have been the faults of him who had shared with her the festivities of many a happy Christmas, they were now buried in his silent tomb, while his virtues lived within her bosom, as warmly appreciated as they were upon her bridal morn.

Of Major Somers, the gay and courted favourite of fortune, the bright and glowing dream that shed its effulgent beams upon her darkest hours, she dare not trust herself to think ; but fought with heroic patience to banish his image from her mind, and to shut the temptation from her heart of believing that his devotion was sincere. They had parted because of his betrothal to another, and to what avail was the fond recollection of the avowal of his love on that ever to be remembered day at Woodbine Cottage.

“Should we ever chance to meet again,” she thought, “it will be as strangers, for now I must toil, toil, toil, until the weary days and nights make me old and grey ; then he will not know me. Yet that is a long way off ; and to feel he loves me now, fills me with a selfish delight I would not, if I could, subdue. Ah ! those are merely dreams ; and I should think of no other happiness than that which can be brought by the knowledge of doing my duty towards my children. Yet, it is hard to struggle on alone in all this misery. No, not quite alone—for Lily carries half my burden for me. How terrified she was

yesterday on seeing that lady on the stairs with Miss Raymond—a person richly dressed, who was looking for lodgings, and who the foolish child imagined to be Harriet Thompson, the girl I once looked upon as a faithful servant, until she fled so strangely from me at Dundrum. Poor little Lily. She is growing pale and thin, her great eyes turn upon me with so wistful an expression, it haunts me; and sometimes it is very hard to manage Charley, he is so passionate and headstrong. Poor George Werter, how proud he once was of the boy, who is now destined to grow to man's estate an ignoramus, unless, indeed, Miss Armsby would interest herself in getting him admission to some school of charity. But, alas! even she has deserted me. Ha! eleven o'clock, and I dreaming idly here; yet I am weary, so very, very weary."

Those rambling thoughts of Florence reveal that her life had been one monotonous struggle from the time of her first coming to lodge at Gloucester Place.

Miss Raymond, although sometimes rude in her manner towards Mrs. Werter, was yet kind

at the heart's core—for even while she hated Charlie for his flippant sarcasm, she forgave him for his mother's sake; and pity for her favourite, Lily, held in check the wrath that sometimes tempted her to hurl the boy from her roof, and cast him adrift upon the world. It could not be expected that the landlady, kind as she was, could afford to give her lodgings for nothing, which Mrs. Werter had engaged at the rate of 15s. 6d. per week, for the house and its contents were her only means of support; and she acted the part of the Good Samaritan, when, after allowing the rent to become three weeks in arrear, she went up one morning to her top floor lodger and offered her and her family a small back room on the lower story for the nominal rent of anything she could pay, which turned out to be nothing at all. Yet Miss Raymond did not press her claim, and the widow lived in hopes of one day being able to discharge the debt.

The poor have few friends. Mrs. Werter thought she had none except her landlady. She had written to Miss Armsby explaining her miserable condition; but no notice had been

taken of the letter. Grieved and disappointed at finding the heart she had once believed to be good and generous turned from her in the day of trouble, Florence regretted ever having applied to her for assistance. In this strait she would have written to Lady Winlow, but could not obtain her address through any channel.

It was Christmas Eve, and Florence had but one solitary sixpence towards the provision of that and the following day. She thought to have procured some little dainty for the children; but, ah! there could be no pies or puddings, no sweet confections or tempting fruits upon the widow's table that Christmas Day.

The morning's dawn had grown in grey streaks upon the wintry sky before the unhappy mother stretched her aching limbs beside her little daughter, and yet she had no better dinner than a crust of bread for the children on Christmas Day. She had toiled, and worked, and saved for it; yet she had but one sixpence left.

Lily crept from her bed very gently, lest she should arouse her mother, on that snowy morning; and, after dressing, began preparations for

breakfast. All was ready when Mrs. Werter opened her eyes, slightly refreshed after her short sleep.

"Are the boys up?" she asked.

"Yes, and out, mother dear; they shall be back presently."

Mrs. Werter rose without further remark.

"Here they are now," resumed the little girl, opening the door, "just in time to send Charley for some bread and sugar. I have a little tea, and a wee morsel of butter for your toast, mamma."

Florence gave the elder boy the precious sixpence, bidding him bring home the required articles, and a penny-piece as change.

Light and thoughtless they started upon their errand, Bamber strong and healthy again, and Charley the same, wild, handsome fellow it was his nature to be, bigger and taller of his age than all his playmates.

Mrs. Werter had scarcely risen from her morning prayer, when Bamber again stood before her, pale and weeping. She could not find voice to ask for the missing child, dreading that the

agitation she now looked upon portended some evil towards him, until Lily ran into the passage, and, with a cry of thankfulness, drew Charley into the room.

For a moment he gazed upon his mother's face with a look of proud defiance; then, stretching his arms towards her, he burst into tears, and sobbed—

“I could not help it—indeed, I could not help it.”

It was sometime before Florence could learn from either what had taken place. When she did, she found it a slight misfortune compared to the dread that at first assailed her mind. Yet it was a heavy trial enough, when Charley, between stammering and tears, confessed that he had lost the coin she gave him.

The last sixpence poor Mrs. Werter possessed in the wide world had fallen from the boy's hand, and rolled down a sewer, almost as he had reached the bakery. She did not upbraid him, nor could she doubt his veracity, even if Bamber had not been a witness to the occurrence—for faulty as the child generally was, robbery and

lying were sins too wicked to find room within his young breast; and if a word of anger rose to his mother's lips, it would have been silenced by the violence of his regret.

An hour after this misfortune, Florence looked round the apartment in renewed anguish for something to substitute in value for the lost coin; but every available article had long since been parted with.

"Lily, come hither," she said, at last, beckoning the little girl towards her, and pressing her white lips tightly together in proud suffering, "take this," she added, quickly. "It is my wedding ring, it never left my finger since he put it there, and it seems loath to come away. How tight it is. It moves. I have worked it off at last. My wedding ring. Yet will you get a sixpence for it, thin and worn as it is now.

She twirled the golden circlet nervously in her hand, as she asked the question; then, with a sudden jerk, passed it into Lily's.

"No, mother," muttered the child, "not that; but this—this."

She held her hand tightly upon her head for a moment, and ran from the room.

Charley, who had lingered beside his mother only for a short time, after confessing his ill luck, had stolen away unperceived, and was in time to forestall Lily's intention.

"Go back," he said, catching a corner of his sister's dress, as she ran along the pavement in terrible distress; "go back, and whatever you have to sell or pawn, keep it now, for I have got a shilling."

"A shilling," repeated Lily, her eye glancing over the figure before her; "poor Charley, you have pawned your jacket this bitter morning. Oh! I could have spared what I meant to sell better far than you can be without that in this frosty air."

"I am not cold now," returned Charley, rubbing his numb fingers along his shirt sleeve; "that is, not very cold; but if you stand talking here, I shall get perished soon enough, so come along until we get the bread and sugar for mother's breakfast."

Charley, restored to self-esteem by the action

he had just performed, laid a loaf upon the table before the widow with as much proud confidence as if it had been the title deed of an estate, which would enrich her for ever after.

"There," he said, tossing back his curls; "there now, pour out the tea, for I am very hungry."

"There, mother dear," whispered Lily, pressing back the ring upon her finger.

The poor mother understood it all; her little son minus of a jacket, while the symbol of past happiness resumed its former place. Yes, she understood it all, and made a show of partaking of the homely fare, lest she should disappoint the loving hearts around her, yet seldom was the heroism of a woman's nature more severely tried.

Christmas eve came on, with its fleecy clouds rolling cheerlessly along a sky laden with the light drift of a snowy shower; down it fell in a drizzling sleet, that made the rich man draw the curtains closer over the window sash, and push nearer to the warm fire, that leaped and sparkled merrily on peace and comfort; down it came in a torrent upon the hut and cabin of the poor, until they

shivered and huddled together beside the smouldering turf upon the hearth-stone ; down it splashed against the naked windows of Florence Werter's lodging, while she looked sadly into an empty grate, and turned away her eyes again, shivering.

Charley had pawned his jacket, had obtained a shilling, and after breakfast it was easy to account for the change, they had procured their dinner, which had been a coarse yet plentiful meal, and hunger was not thought of, as the orphans' teeth chattered in the chilly atmosphere of that Christmas-eve.

Lily looked upon the perishing group as they huddled together near the fireless hearth-stone, and upon a pale rushlight that glimmered upon the mantelpiece, then gliding from the room, she sought that of Miss Raymond's.

"Come in," answered that personage, to the gentle summons at the door. "Ah ! Lily, is it you ; here, my dear, take a seat by the fire, and you shall see me make some nice tarts ; but what is the matter, little girl, you look so white and frightened ?"

" I—I am quite well, thank you, ma'am," she stammered ; " but will you give me a penny. I came to ask a penny from you."

" Yes, and two pence if you want them ; but is that the only cause you have to weep and tremble for, poor dear?"

" Yes, that is all ; I want it, I do want it very, very much," said the girl, grasping the coin tightly in her hand, and bravely struggling with her emotion, " thank you, dear, good Miss Raymond ; now I shall go back to mother, she is so cold."

Lily left the room as abruptly as she had entered, and the landlady would have followed, in her astonishment at the strange behaviour of her favourite, but the little girl waved her hand for her to remain, so the old maid looked back at the crimson cushions and cheerful firelight with a smile of enjoyment ; then nestling her head in the glowing drapery, gave herself up to the delicious influence of slumber.

There was no fire in the widow's grate, because the last fuel had been burned at dinner-time. So Lily stole back to the cold room, and having

secured a canvas bag of considerable dimensions, quitted it again unperceived by the occupants.

It was Christmas Eve, and busy people jostled together in the crowded streets, or hurried on gaily and regardless of the sleet that fell upon their well wrapped forms. Everything was bustle and confusion—happy mothers laden with toys, jolly fathers whose arms were crammed with parcels, young men laughing or smoking, all walked briskly onward; old men hobbled forward with the assistance of a stick, and quietly wondered if another Christmas morning would break upon their graves; maids and matrons went swiftly to and from the market, planning the most expeditious way for making the morrow's pudding, or the best manner for cooking the Christmas turkey.

On flowed the stream of life, taking no heed of a sad young heart, that was borne along its current; men and women passed her by unnoticed, or, if the attention of an individual was arrested by the little figure staggering under the weight of a bag slung across her shoulder, it was but the attention of a child like herself, that soon turned

from her again. And still Lily Werter was pushed and jostled along the crowded pavement, while tears were coursing down the white face in bitter sadness; and her eyes wandered listlessly to the shop windows, or peeped before her through the drizzling sleet which fell, until she found it soaking through her threadbare garments. Still, she could move no faster, for that bag of turf was almost too heavy for her strength. So she tottered slowly on, weary and sick at heart, yet not one in all that crowd knew an iota of the agony she was enduring. Not one of those countless passers-by pitied or cared for that forlorn orphan girl. At last she arrived home, faint and tired out; but it mattered little to her, since the dear ones should have a fire this cold Christmas Eve.

She paused on the door steps, and held her face upwards that snow might wash away the traces of her tears before she entered her mother's presence, then smoothing back her moist tresses, she went into the room with a beaming countenance.

Florence kissed her little daughter fondly, and would have chided her in very love on hearing

what she had done, but it required a harder heart than hers to chase away the look of hope that had come upon that young face, since she had seen it half an hour before. When the fire was bright within the grate Lily went to bed happy and content upon that Christmas Eve.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHRISTMAS AT LINCONDOON.

"The tables were drawn, it was idlesse all,
Knight and page and household squire
Loitered through the lofty hall,
Or crowded round the ample fire."

SCOTT.

A MONTH had passed over Mrs. Fairfield in peace, if not in happiness, and surrounded as she was by affection, she endeavoured with all the firmness of her nature to be cheerful and content, while Frederick Norcott, living the life of a recluse, was miserable in the prospect of leaving his country, home, and Ella; yet impatiently awaiting the hour for his departure, which continued to be deferred in consequence of his increasing ill health. Thus Christmas Eve arrived, and all was bustle and excitement at Lincondoon.

Mrs. Fairfield had not yet seen Major Somers,

owing to his father's indisposition, and was much pleased when Lady Travers told her that she had succeeded in prevailing on all the family to spend the festival at Lincondoon, a feat which no living being but her little ladyship could have accomplished.

Old Mr. Somers was almost astonished at finding himself comfortably ensconced in a velvet chair, beside the blazing fire, in that hospitable mansion; for although a very frequent intercourse existed between the young people, he had never before been persuaded to make one of a visiting party, but completely restored to health as he was, he could not refuse the kindness of friends who frequently enlivened his own hearthstone, particularly at the season when friendship and good feeling prevail over many prejudices.

It was a merry party that grouped together around the cheerful fire-light, waiting for the dinner bell on Christmas Eve. Old Mr. Somers, with his benevolent face and bald head, smiled cheerfully before it. Rettie's brown hair glowed with a brighter tint beneath its crimson glow. Young girls in their evening costumes looked

pleasanter when it gleamed on their white shoulders, gentlemen murmured gentle nothings with a more natural grace when the fire leaped highest in the steel grate to illuminate that vast apartment with its genial flashes.

But there were sad hearts also at Lincondoon that Christmas Eve. Major Somers leaned over a table in a corner, taking up and laying down some beautiful specimens of photographs which he saw not, and feigned to laugh at the gay sallies from the group about the fire, but of which he heard not a syllable. His thoughts were not with them. For at that moment his eyes rested in fancy upon a lovely face bent down to a golden-headed child far off in the distance, while his heart was busy conjuring up the lonely position of a young widow on that Christmas Eve.

But could Audley Somers have indeed pierced through space, and caught a glimpse of Mrs. Werter's sad condition, as she sat in her miserable lodgings at Miss Raymond's, cowering before a fireless grate in want and misery—could he have seen that golden-headed girl plodding through the cold streets that very hour, with tears on her

young cheeks, and sorrow in her loving heart, then, indeed, the light jests of his gay companions would have sounded on his ear in deeper bitterness, and he could not have stood there looking idly at pictures, meaningless and obtruse to him in their very beauty.

Frederick Norcott's heart was sad, as he wandered about the great mansion, avoiding every living soul, and fast turning into a gloomy misanthrope.

Mrs. Fairfield's heart was sad as she sat in her chamber, ready dressed in silk and pearls, with her massive hair coiled round her head, and the grey threads appearing prettily among its blackness. She dreaded to appear before the strangers, and her pulse beat quicker when Lady Travers entered smilingly to chaperon her.

"How many guests have you, dear aunt?" she asked nervously, "and who are they?"

"Oh! several," laughed her ladyship. "First, Miss Rosaline, or as she calls herself Rosebud Arnsby, from Beechgrove, who came with the Somers party, for they are neighbours. She is a maiden of fifty, who tries to cheat her friends

into the belief that she is only twenty, by her juvenile manners and dress, and by her airy graces and ridiculous frivolity.

“Secondly, Mrs. Perry, who brought on her marriage an immense fortune to her husband, a poor colonel; she was the daughter of a rag-merchant, which the glitter of wealth has construed into something more genteel, for she is now run as much after in the fashionable world as if she had been the heiress of a Duke; her entertainments are wonderful, and her equipages faultless.

“Thirdly, Miss Nipp, whose nature is so void of human kindness, so made up of gall and wormwood, that she always leaves a sting behind her, even at Lincondoon.

“Fourthly, the Misses Ponsonby, pretty, intellectual creatures, and hardy sprouts of a proud genealogical tree, whose pedigree is their only dowery, and whose manœuvring mother has so far failed in her plans of transplanting them to rich men’s homes, all because they hold their aristocratic noses too high in the air, and will not marry a commoner.

"Fifthly, the pale sigh-away, sentimental, Miss Gilliflower, who has only just made her *début*, and already declares herself weary of society, vowing that unless to a Milton, a Moore, or a Byron, she will never give away her jewelled fingers. There are many others, my dear, but I must not be sensorious, particularly on my own sex. So now for the gentlemen, beginning with the elder Mr. Somers, father of our gallant Major, a good old gentleman in his way, fond of money, they say, but fonder of his family, loves to hear of horses, hounds, and everything connected with the chase; yet prefers a comfortable dinner, old wine, and a homely chat by the fireside.

"There is the hard-faced Mr. Beak, a quiet, sleek person, who has many of the apparently wealthy aristocrats at his beck and call, yet who is low-born, and lends his money out on usury, puts himself on the same footing as his betters, and is despised and hated by everybody. Doubtless you wonder why he is your uncle's guest, but Sir Gordon follows in the wake of others, and it would not be fashionable to shut our door against one who, be he hated ever so wisely, is also feared.

"Again there is Mr. Sharp, an obliging individual, whose name has the post-fix of D.L., which seems to be a guarantee of a tolerable position. No doubt such men are an evil necessity. He procured this qualification through a poor Tory M.P., as a sop in lieu of his father's debts.

"Also, there are our rollicking, open-hearted sportsmen, a few of whom become the veriest coxcombs of conceit and fastidious politeness the moment their feet press the velvet pile of a drawing-room carpet. But I am wasting time on these ungraceful delineations, which were only drawn for your amusement, for I love and honour every guest around my board, and believe them to be the most delightful, trustworthy, good-natured people in the world. So come down, and I shall introduce you to them one and all."

"But what think you of Miss Somers?" said Ella, still loitering.

"Oh!" replied her ladyship, "Rettie Somers is a natural, unaffected girl. Not so over-refined as to become uncomfortably sensitive; not so rich as to be purse-proud; not so beautiful for vanity

to become her besetting sin; and, in a word, Rettie is a good, generous lassie, full of life, hope and happiness. She will make George Travers a good little wife. There, curb your curiosity now, for I shall give no more graphic portraits of my guests; so do come down at once, my dear."

"I like Miss Somers very much," began Ella, postponing her descent as long as possible, but she was cut short by her relative taking her arm and leading her away.

It was impossible to meet with a more agreeable hostess than Lady Travers; handsome, and although *embonpoint*, every gesture, word, and look, was that of a high-bred and intellectual woman. She was graced with a sweet simplicity of manner, and an open cheerfulness of disposition, yet the dignity which pervaded her frankest moods, revealed the refinement of a charitable and truly ladylike mind. She was a favourite with all who came within her sphere, and there were few of the surrounding gentry who did not hail an invitation to her genial home as an antidote to a stiff dinner-party, or ceremonious conversation of some previous time elsewhere.

When Mrs. Fairfield entered the brilliant circle, there arose a murmur of interest and admiration, while each vied with the other in kind attention to a lady, part of whose sorrowful history had become known to all present.

Dinner passed off as usual on such occasions, and in such a home; after which Major Somers, accompanied by Mr. Travers, were the first to follow the ladies into the drawing-room. The elder Miss Ponsonby was performing a brilliant fantasia on the pianoforte as they did so, and they took their seats in silence until it was finished.

"That is an arrangement of Mr. Travers," remarked the girl, leaving the instrument, and glancing archly at the gentleman named, "he is a lover of good music, and an adept in the art, but so selfish that he will not use his rare talents, except for his own amusement."

"A cruel sentence," laughed Travers, "but blame me not if I prefer seeing a lady seated at the pianoforte to an ungraceful individual who does not wear a train; yet with your permission I shall exculpate myself before the evening is ended; so for the present bowing to your

just accusation of selfishness, I shall take the liberty of requesting Mrs. Fairfield to move towards the harp, and if she grants my request I feel that I shall be gaining the gratification of all present, especially one who is so passionately fond of sweet strains as the fair Miss Ponsonby."

The lady bowed and smiled, but did not seem at all so passionately fond of sweet strains as George Travers predicted, for a frown gathered on her brow when she heard his pleading voice address the stranger, and saw his manly face lighted with affection as he led her to the instrument, on which he knew that she had once excelled.

This was a terrible ordeal for one who had lived so long in retirement, and who had not touched the once loved chords for more than the space of five years. Ella trembled and turned pale for a second, then smiling beneath the dark eyes that were bent encouragingly upon her, she conquered her timidity, and drawing the harp towards her, began a prelude to an old Scotch ballad, which had been a favourite of her uncle's in her girlish days. The remainder of the gentlemen entered

on the moment, but in the familiar melody of by-gone hours, all else was forgotten, and she sent forth a stream of harmony now loud, passionate, and intense, then sinking into a cadence of wild sweetness, which melting into the faintest echoes, vibrated in every corner of the apartment; the strings seemed to weep and wail beneath her supple fingers, until the tears fell from her eyes, and looking round hastily, in the hope that her emotion had not been observed, she encountered the face of her uncle turned towards her with so much fond yet sorrowful affection, that the instrument glided from her grasp in abrupt silence.

Overcoming her agitation with an effort, Mrs. Fairfield struck a chord on another key, and began afresh. It must have been a wedding march, so joyous, yet sublime, was the music that issued from it. But it was truly the overflowing of a grateful heart that sought the sympathetic expression of music to assure the dear ones present of her own happiness; and when she arose, flushed and excited, she was hailed with a burst of applause as loud as it was sincere. Mr. Travers, who had remained standing near his cousin,

looked angrily around as the noise continued, and was the only one who refrained from complimenting the fair musician.

"Was it an improvise?" he asked, as Ella looked towards him.

"No," she replied, "a kind of reverie, I believe, although a glad one; chiefly composed from the recollections of a young child's singing."

"That difficult music, with all its thrills and cadences?"

"Yes; hers was a voice of wondrous flexibility."

"She must have been an angel to accomplish such a feat," remarked Major Somers, almost startling Mrs. Fairfield by his near vicinity. "Scarcely less than something angelical could bring upon our earthly sphere such heavenly strains."

"She is a gifted child of nature," returned Ella, "and possessing a voice of rare power and sweetness, which, although uncultivated, can execute the most brilliant passages with almost the graceful ease of a nightingale. Her name is Lily Werter."

Major Somers started, and perceiving the lady's

eyes resting on him with peculiar meaning plucked an exotic that grew on a stand beside him and enquired pointedly if she were a botanist.

"The order Liliacæ is an interesting one," he continued, "which, if you will walk with me into the conservatory, we can more freely discuss."

She took his proffered arm, and they were soon partially removed from the festive scene.

"We cannot be quite strangers, you and I," he remarked, "if kindly repute can make one acquainted with the other."

"Ah!" she returned, "repute is sometimes false, and it were well to disbelieve what is generally carried on its wings."

"It came from a source I could not doubt, from a heart grateful for much kindness."

"From one," answered Ella, "who could not harbour an evil thought or feeling, and is rather too prone to magnify another's virtue." He remained silent, and she continued—"Ah! Major Somers, can you, who knows Florence Werter so well, believe a calumny against her? You look astonished, but have you not received a letter derogatory to her?"

"What do you know of it?" he interrupted.

"Put me in the way of tracing the hand that guided that black falsehood, and I shall be indebted to you for life."

"Then you do not credit it?"

"Mrs. Fairfield, how can you ask the question? But tell me who or what is he who penned the base effusion, and you will much oblige me."

Ella drew her hand from his arm, and confronted him more fully. She was pale and trembling, but remained silent.

"You know the person," he resumed, "do pray tell me who and what is he."

"My husband," she replied.

"Your husband, Mrs. Fairfield; why what motive could he have in such conduct?"

"Mr. Fairfield and Mr. Fitzroy are one and the same person," she answered.

"But what of Fitzroy? I cannot understand your meaning. I do not know him at all."

"You must have met him frequently at Lilymount, where he was an intimate guest during Colonel Werter's lifetime."

"I have never visited Lilymount, for in consequence of being so much on foreign service, I

had but little opportunity of entering the society of our neighbourhood, particularly as my father is rather old to incur the responsibility of entertaining much; and Rettie was then too young to make her *début*. It was shortly after my return from abroad, and but a little time before her father's death, that I had the honour of an introduction even to Miss Werter, now Lady Winlow."

"And you never saw Mrs. Werter until she became a widow?" asked Ella.

"I did, twice or thrice, by accident or fate, but never knew her personally till then. I feel that you are friendly disposed towards me, and instinct assures me that I may place confidence in you; but first about this letter."

"It was penned by my husband. She you love is in danger. This man has vowed a terrible revenge for the scorn an insulted wife had courage to heap upon him; but it is a long story, so let us resume our walk, and I shall explain all to you, however painful it be to myself."

CHAPTER XX.

FREEDOM.

"Those hairs of age are messengers
Which bid me fast repent and pray."

LORD VAUX.

THE evening was far advanced when Eleanor Fairfield and Major Somers returned to the festive scene, where she was immediately overwhelmed with requests to repeat her rare performance on the harp, with which, accustomed to gratify others rather than herself, she complied, and with the same success that had before crowned her efforts.

"Rettie, come with me," murmured Audley, addressing his sister, who was standing with George Travers in the recess of a window. The young girl looked up in affright on hearing the tremulous tones of her brother's voice, and leaving her companion in silence, she allowed herself to be led from the room.

Major Somers had revealed everything to Rettie that Mrs. Fairfield had confided to him, when they were rejoined by her in the library.

"But Mrs. Fairfield can acquaint you with Mrs. Werter's abode, perhaps," said Miss Somers, resuming the conversation.

"I cannot, for I left Lilymount so suddenly that she would not know where to address a letter were she even inclined to write."

"That is unfortunate, yet I feel assured that through dear Granny Armsby we shall gain tidings of her."

"I should not seek her," said Somers thoughtfully, "for it were wiser that we should not meet again; but I must act towards her as a brother now, and protect her from the devices of a villain; and Rettie, you shall help me."

Mrs. Fairfield shivered nervously as she added — "So will I."

"Dear Audley, release me from my promise, for if our father knew of this attachment he never would enforce you to a marriage with one so little in accordance to your tastes as Lady Alcott's niece."

“No, Rettie, I charge you that he be left in ignorance of the sacrifice which it is his right to claim. Dear old man, he would part with children, home, wealth, and every other treasure he possessed rather than break his word with any human being ; but we will speak of this anon, for here is the Rosebud shedding smiles upon us as her fair namesake scatters its leaves on the ungrateful soil. Mrs. Fairfield, allow me to introduce you to Miss Armsby.”

The little spinster had entered the library unannounced, and finding it already occupied, started in well-feigned surprise, smiling blandly on Ella. She remarked that the dancing was beginning to flag, but that if Major Somers would seek a partner it could not fail to be renewed with spirit.

After this appeal, the Major could do no less than offer her his arm ; and her tiny limbs and gauzy robes were soon cutting fairy circles in the magic dance with him.

Long before the young people thought of repose, old Mr. Somers had retired to his chamber, where he sat wrapped in a fur dressing-gown, on

an easy-chair by the fire. A small table stood beside him, on which rested a family Bible ; and as the clock sent forth the last chime of midnight, he ceased reading. Removing the spectacles from his face, he rubbed the glasses with his silk handkerchief, then placing them between the leaves of the sacred volume, closed it with a smile of quiet contentment. Scarcely had he done so, when a gentle tap came to the door, and as he looked up, he stretched forth his arms to receive his favourite child within them.

“Not in bed yet, papa ?” said Rettie, fondly stroking the bald head before her. “I came for my good-night’s kiss, sir.”

“Then why don’t you take it and begone, before the gay revellers have time to miss my sweet lambkin ?”

“They cannot miss her from so many who are sweeter and happier,” said Miss Somers, drawing a low stool to her father’s feet, and seating herself upon it. “Father,” she continued, “I never yet have asked a favour of you in vain. I do believe you could not refuse me anything consistent with honour and principle.”

"I could not, my child, because anything that was not consistent with principle and honour could never be asked by you."

The young girl sighed deeply, and turned her face towards the fire to hide the tears that started to her eyes unbidden.

"Ah!" she murmured, "this Christmas Eve seems sadder to me than any other I have ever known before."

"Because, darling, you are a year older; and the thoughtless maiden is twelve months nearer to the staid duties of womanhood."

"It is not that, papa; but Audley, dear Audley. Did it never occur to you, sir, that he is far from being happy in the engagement which others have forced upon him?"

"Rettie! Rettie!" cried Mr. Somers, endeavouring to hide a covert smile in a semblance of sternness; "but you are speaking at random, child, and needlessly alarming me. Audley is willing to fulfil his parent's plighted word. The good lad who never yet caused me a moment's pain I feel will not do so now. Hark! here is his footstep. He, too, comes to wish the old man good-night. Bless him! bless you both, my children!"

"Not asleep, sir," remarked Audley, entering ;
"but what is this, Rettie in tears ? Sister, you
have broken faith with me. I read it on my
father's brow ; I see it in your downcast looks.
Oh ! is this your promise ?"

"She told me but little," said Mr. Somers,
gravely, "which proves there is much to tell.
Speak for yourself, Audley, and fear not to reveal
the truth to a parent, who would do much for a
son's welfare ; but if it be relative to your engage-
ment with Jane Alcott, you know my word is
passed. How then can it be recalled ?"

"I know it, sir ; and I am prepared to keep it
sacred."

"Oh ! father dear," cried Rettie, "heed him
not ; you do not know the struggles he has had.
Sir, consider—it will out, although he bound me
by a promise not to reveal the secret of his love
for another ; but I tell it now, by which I forfeit
his esteem. Yet I can afford even that in an
effort for his happiness. Father, if this marriage
be insisted on, it will be to the destruction of your
only son's well being."

The old man wiped his face with his handker-
chief, like a person in extreme agitation. Yet,

if Rettie's mind had not been so pre-occupied, she might have found him chuckling merrily behind its silken folds.

"Peace, foolish girl!" he said, at length. "Your affection for your brother has proved stronger than your rectitude." Then addressing Audley, who had turned his eyes from what he took to be his father's grief, the old man added, in the same grave tone, "What say you for yourself, my son; shall your father's word be forfeited, for, it may be, a blind passion for an unworthy object?"

"Never, sir, never; best and kindest of parents that you have ever been to me, the sacrifice of my life would be but a poor acknowledgment of all I owe you."

"Now, God be thanked," said the old man, laying his hand reverently upon the book before him; then turning to Rettie, who stood abashed and reproved, he opened his arms, and half astonished she sprang within them. "Generous heart," he murmured, "ever willing to pain itself for other's weal. Rettie, look upon my face, and tell me what you see upon it."

She raised her eyes fondly, and said—

“Kindness, affection, all that is good and noble; and—and I do declare, a very happy smile.”

“Which could not be there, at the expense of a son’s future hopes. I have tried you both, my children—one was wanting, and the other has proved all that I had deemed. But you are forgiven, sweet child of my best love. Yet, stay, it must be on condition that you never break faith with George Travers.”

Rettie placed her hand over his lips, as a vivid blush mounted to her brow.

“Father,” she said, “what does this mean? Something has occurred to release you and Audley from what has lately been distasteful, even to yourself, sir.”

“And how know you that, chatterbox?”

“I, who know every expression of your dear face, who have studied it as a book from my very childhood, could scarcely fail to detect it there.”

“Well, nothing has occurred, except that Audley has been simply jilted by his bride elect,

who no doubt has made a better choice; and as the wife of a fashionable, but used-up lordling, has forgotten her tardy betrothed. Here is a newspaper with an account of bridesmaids, dress, *dejeuner*, &c.; and here a letter from her dowager mother, begging our pardon in the most finished style of a woman of the world."

"Why not acquaint us of this before, sir?" asked Audley, joyously.

"Because, I only received the tidings myself yesterday, and as I saw, from sundry signs and tokens, that the tie I had formed was fettering and worrying you—in a word, boy, I tested your obedience, and proved the inconsistency of a woman's vow, which shall be duly reported to—"

Again the little hand was on his lips, and again the bright face was suffused with blushes.

"Now," said Mr. Somers, pleasantly drawing his chair closer to the fire, and signing the others to a seat at either side of him, "now tell me who the divinity may be that is to supply the place of Rettie as a daughter, when she leaves my roof tree."

"One whom you have never seen yet, sir," re-

plied Rettie, "but who is so good and beautiful that you will love her dearly. Her name is Mrs. Werter."

"A Mrs. already. Bah! I hate widows. Old enough to be your grandmother, I warrant, with a dozen squalling children ready reared."

"No, no, sir," laughed the Major, "the lady is more than six years my junior."

"But the children—the squallers?"

"She has three, sir—two noble boys, and one girl, who is the sweetest, brightest child that ever gladdened an old man's heart."

"That is all very fine; but when half-a-dozen young Somers are added to the group, they will fight and squabble until your house becomes a very Bedlam. Well—well, perhaps when the diabolical noise has driven me from my son's hearth, I shall find a snug corner by the fireside of Mrs. Travers, and *vice versa*—"

This time the old man's lips were stopped with a loving kiss, and Rettie tripped light and happy from the room.

Coming from his father's presence, Audley listened for a moment at his sister's chamber,

and hearing her young voice raised in prayer, he moved on satisfied that she too felt as he did, and had sought the privacy of her room rather than the dance and merry games of the first dawn of Christmas morning.

Thus the last moments of Christmas Eve, bearing upon its sands the records of renewed hopes and happiness, passed away pleasantly at Lincondoon, while the velvet couches and satin draperies blended their colours warmly together beneath the genial brightness of a rich man's home. Yet Florence Werter, with all her youth and virtues, was then shut out from its charmed circle, while the golden-headed girl, whose image rose before Audley's imagination some hours before, was lying on a hard pallet, anxiously wondering if her mother would like to hear next morning the merry Christmas chimes.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WORKING OF THE USURER'S VOW.

"I saw her upon nearer view
A spirit, yet a woman too."

WORDSWORTH.

THE snow had fallen heavily through the night, and Christmas morning rose upon the earth in dazzling brightness; faint sunbeams sparkled with myriad hues upon its spotless crest, until it seemed glowing with a thousand gems; white flakes hung upon the leafless trees in fantastic drapery, and clung to the boughs like pale blossoms; the hills covered with their pure mantles shone in clear relief from the grey sky, and the lakes, sheeted with their icy store, lay in calm repose beneath. The Christmas snow came over fields and dells in pleasant beauty; but in the close streets, with busy feet laden with the turmoil of worldly passions trampling over the crisp ground, it looked sad and dull enough.

Lily Werter stood at the window listening to the merry chimes, and pressing her face against the pane, thinking all the while what they should do for their Christmas dinner. However, she was soon roused by a cheerful voice behind her, and looking back she saw Miss Raymond carrying a tray, on which stood a rice pie, some spiced beef, and sundry other little articles, while her mother stood beside her with a look of intense gratitude upon her face.

"No thanks at all, ma'am," said the good-natured landlady, "for I have been made a present of more than twice these groceries, and everything else you see are only meant as a Christmas box to Miss Lily. Bless her little heart, how sweet and pretty she looks this morning with those big ringlets floating about her in a golden shower. Now, madam, if it be possible for you to enjoy yourself for one day be happy on this blessed one; so I am off now to prayers. Listen how gaily the bells ring out, they are enough to draw the tardiest feet to some place of worship."

Miss Raymond, in her eagerness to escape,

forgot that it was more than an hour too soon for the commencement of church service. As the door banged after her she was surprised to see Lily standing in the passage, who, not wait-to be spoken to, sprang to the woman's neck, kissing her hands, cheeks, and lips in a passion of the deepest gratitude, and the landlady was pleased and gratified, despite her assurance of requiring no reward or thanks for her kindness.

They say it never rains but it pours, and Mrs. Werter had scarcely put away Miss Raymond's present, when a large hamper was seen standing in its place, the contents of which was a gift from Mrs. Lindley, accompanied by a kind note of good wishes and affectionate inquiries, to which was added a short postscript, one little line that sent the blood to and from Lily's cheek in quick succession, a few words merely announcing the probable visit of William ere the day was over.

So the Christmas chimes rang merrily on, but not so merrily as the beating of Lily's heart; gay faces passed her by as she stood on the doorstep looking out, but none so glad or gay as her own. William was coming, the boy lover, the

boy gentleman, the prince of poor aristocracy, the one bright star of Lily's dull existence; he was coming, and all her anxious sorrows were forgotten; he was coming, and earth was full of happiness.

She closed the street door, returned to the poverty-stricken room, and endeavoured to make it look more comfortable by the aid of a good fire. Her brothers had gone out delighted at the prospect of Mrs. Lindley's plum pudding and Miss Raymond's tarts, so Lily and her mother were preparing for church, when a smart knock came to the room door.

"It is William," said Lily, clasping her hands, and answering the summons.

But with a cry of terror she soon drew back again, and the next moment Mr. Fitzroy stood before Mrs. Werter.

"At last," he said, looking around the wretched apartment with a smile of satisfaction; "at last I have found you, after days and nights of sleepless anguish and unceasing toil. Now, Florence, you have drained to the dregs your cup of misery; you are reduced to the lowest ebb of poverty,

want, starvation, almost rags, and I am here to offer you again all that wealth, love, and a life devoted to your happiness can bestow."

Mrs. Werter was not long in regaining the self-possession of which the sudden appearance of her foe had deprived her, and throwing back her head with a gesture of scorn, she spoke distinctly, never removing her eyes from his face as she did so.

"Edmond Fitzroy," she said, "your life has been a lie, your very name a cheat; you have persecuted the widow of your benefactor with the vilest insults that a man can offer to a woman. Professing love to me while bound by every tie of God's commandment to another; following a vile passion while forsaking a virtuous wife; you have robbed my children of their home, and hunted me from place to place, blackening my fair fame, and reducing me to this, as you rightly say, to the lowest state of poverty; but the dregs of my cup of misery are those I drink while compelled to breathe the atmosphere with you. The rags I wear are as the robe of an empress as long as they can keep clear of the contamination of

your presence, and want, starvation, pain, or suffering are happiness compared to the agony I feel while you are before me. Away! this is my home, poor and wretched though it be; sully it no longer by remaining in it."

Speechless with surprise, and listening to the words that issued so calmly from her scornful lips, to enter into his brain like molten fire, Fitzroy stood, arrested in his progress across the floor, until another voice fell upon his ear.

"Sir, sir," cried Lily, "can you not see how you pain my mother? If you have any kindness in your heart, pray go away."

Fitzroy turned savagely towards the child, and pushing her roughly aside caught the hand of Mrs. Werter, and forced her to a seat.

"Defy me not," he hissed, "for I am dangerous now, and having regained you no stratagem shall work your escape from my power. Concede to my terms, and heed not the ravings of a mad woman, who calls herself my wife, for I swear she is a stranger to me. I love or hate you, as you will—it matters not—for once mine you shall be happy. Indeed, Florence, in following you thus, I am but working out our fate."

He held her hand as in a vice while he spoke, and attempted to get possession of the other, but with a violent effort she wrenched it from him ; he caught it again, when the door was flung aside, and William Lindley stood before them.

A glance sufficed to explain what had taken place, and shaking the ruffian by the collar he forced him to release the terrified lady, who fell trembling on the chair behind her, with the arms of Lily twined lovingly around her.

William had come, and the child could feel no terror now.

Panting with suppressed rage Lindley glared upon the crest-fallen villian like a young lion preparing to crush a rattlesnake upon his path.

“Coward,” he said, at length ; “vile, pitiful coward, fly from my sight before I tear you limb from limb. Fitzroy, I have never looked upon your face till now, and I shall know you among a thousand should we ever meet again ; all my nature is up in arms against you, and by the instinct of what is good within me, and which recoils from you in loathing, I feel that she, Mrs. Werter, shall one day triumph over you.”

“And who is the boastful schoolboy who thus

so kindly forewarns me?" asked Fitzroy, with sarcasm.

"My name is William Lindley," replied the other, haughtily.

"I shall not forget it, and should we meet again it may be when you least expect it, Mr. William Lindley."

Fitzroy stared at the boy, who bore the scrutiny with equanimity; then turning to Florence with a bow, he added—

"We too, lady, shall meet again."

He quitted the room, carrying his hat courteously in his hand, until the door closed after him.

All three turned their eyes on each other when he was gone, and William, advancing affectionately towards Mrs. Werter, endeavoured to reassure her by the kindest reasoning he could employ; but now discovered again by her persecutor, the unfortunate victim of his mad infatuation could find no comfort or security either in the lad's words or in her present home.

Finding all his efforts to cheer her in vain, William turned towards Lily, and pressing her

hand lovingly between his own, bent his lips to her golden head, and twined the beautiful hair around his fingers in undisguised admiration.

"How well I love those curls of yours," he whispered, "almost as well as I love yourself, sweet Lily. I suppose it is because I have no sister of my own that I look upon you as one, for you are very dear to me."

"And I," murmured the little girl, raising her eyes eagerly to his face, "I love you a thousand times better than I love either Bamber or Charlie."

That Christmas-day, after all, was a happy one in the widow's lodgings, and for a while after there was peace and plenty in the little room, then the store of goodly provisions ran out, and the Warters were as badly off as ever.

In the meantime Florence had taken care to explain to Miss Raymond every particular relative to Fitzroy, and obtained her promise of, in future, using precaution as to the visitors she admitted to her, which made the widow feel somewhat secure of being protected from his intrusion; still even were her position more accessible to his insults, she had no alternative, for not possessing

the means of paying for lodgings elsewhere, she was obliged to rest content with that which was bestowed on her through kindness.

Florence might have applied to the police authorities for protection from all the annoyance she was subject to from him, whom she looked upon as her most bitter enemy, but then the *exposé*—beside, she could not explain because she did not understand his ridiculous and extraordinary conduct.

Burning with rage and disappointment, Fitzroy fled from Miss Raymond's, and returned to his hotel, with the bitterest feelings of revenge busy at his heart, which were rather augmented than appeased by finding his valet figuring gaily before a cheval glass in the choicest garments of his master's wardrobe.

The millionaire stood for a time contemplating the delighted menial, and struggling to overcome his passion, while feeling inclined to fell the audacious scoundrel to the floor; but, after a few minutes of concentrated rage, his haughty pride broke down, and he gave way to an uncontrollable burst of laughter.

John, startled by the unusual sound coming from such an unexpected source, gaped open-mouthed upon Fitzroy, then both giggled and screamed, and screamed and giggled, until the gentleman threw himself upon a couch, declaring that he would be no longer fooled.

“Sir,” began John, attempting to pull off some of the coveted finery, with all the steadiness he could assume, for he had been previously indulging in his master’s half-guinea champagne, for which he had a peculiar weakness, since he became acquainted with the military heroes in his search for Mrs. Werter. “Sir, I was only endeavouring to bring before my mind’s eye the aristocratic bearing of yourself, by putting upon this misshaped form the garments which must have cost a mint of money.” Here he paused and stammered, “and which I think do not become me quite so well as plush inexpressibles and silk stockings.”

“Still you would have no objection to them, eh, John?” said the money-lender, closely scrutinizing the physiognomy reflected in the glass beside him.

"Oh! none whatever, sir," answered the new-made dandy, bowing until his perfumed hair almost touched the tops of his patent leather pumps.

"Come nearer to me, then."

Fitzroy, apparently aroused for the first time to the real condition of his dependent, shook his head despondently as he muttered, "You are intoxicated; this is the way you keep your oath of amendment? this your pledge of abstemiousness?"

The words that fell from the usurer's lips, although harsh in their meaning, possessed the tone of covert friendliness, the encouragement of a *roué* gratified with his triumph over an envied, because a better nature than his own.

"Oh!" hickuped John, "deeply as I am indebted for your kind consideration and forbearance, I—I—in fact I like champagne, gay companions, sweet smiles, jovial entertainments, and don't see why the d—— you should bring me to account for it."

"Because," said Fitzroy, "you are in my power—in my debt, I mean; I intend breaking up my establishment at Grosvenor Square, and

now that you have become too fine a gentleman for private service, I was thinking of getting you a public one—tolerably educated as you are, having mixed a good deal with those of more refined blood than your own, and with my interest you shall obtain some Government appointment, which, with the annuity I have given, will enable you to live in a sphere you are fitted to adorn. In the meantime keep these articles of my wardrobe, and leave me.”

“By all that is beautiful, including myself, you are a regular brick, sir,” lisped John, staggering from the room in his master’s finery.

“How deep am I in this man’s power?” mused Fitzroy, as the servant disappeared. “How much or how little does he know? Could he have ferreted out of Norcott anything connected with Colonel Werter? At all events he is safer removed from my path, and this love of drink will be a sure and speedy weapon for his own destruction.”

Leaping from his seat, the plotter paced the apartment, with the same fiendish light looming from his eyes, that had loomed there on first sus-

pecting his valet of trifling with him in his pursuit of Florence.

"Yes, John," he muttered, "you shall have that suit of clothes, and welcome, but you must keep sober for a week to renovate your appearance, during which time I must manage to insure your life for more than it is worth, and I shall give you some of the overplus to continue a sober respectable man, which of course you could not do, nor keep from the delicious draughts which agree so nicely with a constitution not much the better of hard living as yours is. Oh! draughts of the devil's brewing, for once I bless your maddening influence. Yes, John, you shall have those nicely fitting garments. Ha! ha! dead men tell no tales, and that is your fate."

Pausing in his tiger-like walk, Fitzroy leaned on the mantel-piece, and bending his burning brow upon it, continued, with horrible bitterness, "I thought to have been successful in the same game with Frederick Norcott; to have bribed and wheedled him on to drink to death, but he had a woman's hand near him, to dash aside the cup he doted on; a woman's hand, and hers; she whose pretty face was the means of first placing

the stepping-stone to fortune under my ambitious feet, for it was from her thousands that I accumulated all my wealth, my beautiful, glittering coins ; the pretty face from which I fled to chase a lovely phantom. A phantom that always receded as I advanced, and whose mystic coldness charmed me with a potent spell.

“ Oh ! Florence, I shall yet bend your haughty spirit to the dust ; for what reason were your husband’s drugs tampered with ? why was all medicinal skill unavailing in Colonel Werter’s ailments ; it was not that another should get possession of his wife, though she was young and lovely enough to warm a stoic’s breast. No, it was Lilymount, the luxurious mansion, with its rich demesne, that tempted the poisonous hand to sleek and fawn upon the thing it meant to kill. But do I love her ? that horrid, beautiful phantom, why does her presence fill me with a wild happiness, a fierce strength that fain would annihilate her, even as I could fold her tenderly upon my bosom. Love—no, it is not love—it must be hate, direful hate that dies but in the death of the detested victim.”

CHAPTER XXII.

FITZROY GIVES HIS VALET A LESSON.

"Each spake words of high disdain,
And insults to each heart's best brother."

COLERIDGE.

"GORMAN," said Fitzroy, the next morning, as his servant entered to draw on his tightly-fitting boots, "you are greatly in arrears of my account, you are deeply in my debt. I have warned you against your insane habits of debauchery, and besought you to turn from your evil habits, but my counsels have been of no avail, for you are more addicted to them than ever. Now, as I said yesterday, I intend getting you a public appointment, but it must be on condition that you keep from what I find fault with even for one week, in order to prove to me that you have a little self-control; if you cannot do this you must leave my service, and as some of the money not forth-

coming belongs to other parties, most likely they will thrust you into prison."

"Into prison," repeated John, his limbs trembling under him, as if struck with ague. "Diet, bread and water, gruel at furthest; dress, grey flannel of the coarsest material and most clumsy tailoring; appearance, cropped hair, and down-cast looks; occupation, the treadmill, step, step, up, up. Yes, I could manage that well enough, but cropped hair is abominable, and would not become one of my gentility; then the diet, for one accustomed to good living on the fat of the land, as the prayer-book says, not speaking of anything else,—bah! desperate. Water instead of champagne, gruel in lieu of pastry and savory dishes. Oh, Lor! it is too much, sir, I could not stand the fare, however well I could walk the treadmill."

"Yet you are dancing and gibbering almost as if delighted at the prospect; but never mind, John, I would rather see you a gentleman than a gaol bird, and as I know that the money, without being dissolved into any liquid form, has made some pleasant beverages for you, I shall make it up myself upon the said condition."

"To keep sober for a week, sir?" demanded John; "that is easy enough, or for twenty if you wish."

"One first. Now stand in the position I place you, for you will have to undergo an examination before the Board."

"Like a horse, sir. Sound, wind and limb?"

"You are to answer my questions without speaking further," instructed the usurer. "What is your age?"

"Forty."

"That won't do; too old by ten years. Now, sir, how old are you?"

"Thirty," answered John, with a wry face.

"Are you of sober habits?"

"Never tasted a drop of liquor in my life but once, and then it was given to me by a nurse when I was a baby, which set me off into a fit of convulsions, and ever since I have a horror of anything stronger than that which flows from the purest fountain of nature's bosom."

"Humbug. Answer as I told you, or leave the room. Are you of sober habits?"

"I—yes, sir. I am a teetotaler."

“ Did any of your family die of consumption, or of any other hereditary disease?”

“ Never. The youngest was a hundred and two when he died. But Lor’, sir,” added the man, with a sagacious nod, “ never doubt me. I will know how to manage these board gentlemen when I get before them.”

“ Well, we shall speak of this again; but remember, there must be no exaggeration, such as nature’s fountain, or any other nonsense; all must have the semblance of truth, or you will be rejected. Now I shall breakfast, and in the meantime you can do the same.”

“ Will he keep steady in this business?” Fitzroy muttered over his chocolate; “ does he suspect treachery in it? I thought that he was fooling me. Strange if I should be made the dupe of my [own servant. Well, we shall see; so now for that clever girl, she, at all events, serves me faithfully.” He took his hat and gloves and sauntered into the street.

Having passed Merrion Square, he entered one of the fine houses of Ely Place. The servant who opened the door knew him well, for he had been

a frequent visitor to the lady who lodged in the best apartments of the house, and was understood to be her brother, as both had stated so much.

The usurer had no need to knock before entering a room decorated with rich drapery and costly furniture, for he was met at the door by a rather showily dressed woman, who greeted him familiarly.

Could Mrs. Werter have looked for a second upon the handsome but vulgar face of the person who welcomed Ella Fairfield's husband, she would have recognised her old servant, Harriet Thompson.

"How is Beauty?" he asked, closing the door behind them.

"Well enough," she answered sulkily, "but for all you care you need not trouble yourself to question."

"Beauty vexed because I forgot the velvet and laces? But she shall purchase them herself if she looks pleasant, for I have not long to stay."

"You never have long to stay, never since we

came to this miserable country; never since we left dear London, with its life and fashion, its theatres and amusements. You said you would be here but a week or so, and now it is a month or more, all for the sake of hunting after that stuck-up widow, who hates the very ground you walk upon."

"In which pursuit, Harriet, you know if I gain you will be no loser. I have discovered her residence."

"It is time, for the lady of this house has given me a polite notice to quit."

"There are other lodgings to be had as good, so now to business. You were always a quick-witted girl, and your tact has enabled me to discover in a day what John lost all the time you complain of for nothing."

"I knew I was right. I knew I could not be mistaken, and you owe me something for my smartness in haunting Gloucester Place."

Harriet Thompson had followed the same figure to the same house for two different days, then, on pretext of seeking for lodging, she cleverly managed to learn from Miss Raymond what other

families were living there, and with seeming careless, but cautious, questions wormed out of the unsuspecting landlady every particular she wished to learn about Mrs. Werter. On descending the stairs a little girl ran along the passage whom she instantly recognised as her former charge, Lily; then she hurried from the house, satisfied with her success, and to complete the advantage she had gained by making her own terms with Fitzroy. When that gentleman followed her directions, and actually found the miserable home of the unhappy lady he had sought so long he gave Harriet the full credit she deserved. So the fallen child of vice and vanity pocketed her purse of gold without a shadow of remorse.

END OF VOL. II.



